

Negotiation of Conflicting Desires: How consumers negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainability desires

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Abstract

This study explores how consumers negotiate between materialistic and sustainability desires. Sustainable fashion was chosen as the context for this study because while fashion is usually consumed for materialistic reasons, sustainable fashion is consumed also for sustainability reasons. Consumers of sustainable fashion (hereafter “sustainable consumers”) thus experience both materialistic and sustainability desires, leading to conflict between these two very different desires. This study is positioned within the mass-mediated marketplace ideologies stream of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT). This study contributes to this stream of research by examining the ways that consumers negotiate between contradicting ideologies.

This study uses qualitative research methods, and the data was analysed using discursive analysis. The data set is made up of ten popular sustainable fashion blogs written by sustainable consumers. This study fits within the analytical framework of Richins & Dawson's (1992) three themes of materialism.

The findings of this study revealed the following five themes within the data: 1) possession-defined success 2) acquisition as the pursuit of happiness 3) acquisition centrality 4) fast fashion and consumerism and so-called 5) responsabilization. Sustainable consumers demonstrated conflict between materialistic and sustainability desires and different ways of negotiating between them. Sustainable consumers relied on their fashion items for self-expression and cultivating their identities as conscious consumers who carefully research and buy sustainable brands – thus fulfilling their desire for possession-defined success and sustainability. Sustainable consumers were also seen to cultivate a bond with their products so as to create and subsequently prolong the sense of happiness they provide.

Sustainable consumers struggled more with negotiating between materialistic desires for acquisition centrality and sustainability. With some success they resolved these conflicts by limiting their purchases and finding sustainable ways to purchase new products. In the domain of fast fashion and consumerism they were however unable to resolve their conflicts by negotiation as these concepts were constructed as being in opposition to sustainability. This study finds that consumers can negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainability desires to a great extent. It is thus often possible for consumers to satisfy both desires simultaneously in the domain of consumption.

Keywords sustainable consumption, materialistic desires, sustainability desires, consumer culture, negotiation, conflicting consumption desires, discursive analysis

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1. Introduction

There exists a conflict between the desires to consume for materialistic reasons and the desires to consume for sustainable reasons. Previous research has found that materialistic consumers tend to engage less in environmentally friendly behaviours and exhibit lower environmental attitudes than non-materialistic consumers (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Joung, 2013). However, these studies have not examined how consumers negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainability desires and whether consumers can satisfy both desires simultaneously or if they are simply mutually exclusive. Since materialistic lifestyles are becoming increasingly common (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008) and environmental degradation is a pressing issue, it is important to investigate how consumers negotiate between these conflicting desires and values. The context of sustainable fashion provides a fruitful context in which to study this phenomenon because fashion is generally consumed for materialistic reasons, however, sustainable fashion is also consumed for sustainability reasons. Therefore, both types of desires are present in the consumption of sustainable fashion.

1.1. Materialism and Sustainable Consumption

Previous research has examined the phenomenon of materialism and materialistic consumption (Belk, 1985; Richins, 1994; Richins & Dawson, 1992). Materialism can be viewed as a value that guides the behaviour of consumers (Richins & Dawson, 1992). When consumers use materialistic values to guide their behaviour they are trying to satisfy the desires that arise from their materialistic values. When consumers consume for materialistic reasons they do not make consumption decisions based on utilitarian needs (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Instead they consume for reasons such as creating and displaying their identity and status, using possessions to find happiness, and turning the acquisition of possessions into goals and endeavours that create meaning in their lives (Belk, 1985; Richins, 1994; Richins & Dawson, 1992).

The above kinds of reasons to consume are based on desires that are termed materialistic desires in this thesis. These materialistic desires are centred around the individual and the

satisfaction of these materialistic desires is focused only on satisfying the individual. Many consumers who try to satisfy their materialistic desires with consumption consume more than necessary (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

In contrast to materialism, sustainable consumption is focused on consuming in a way that does not create harm to the environment or society (Joy et al., 2012). It is unsustainable for all consumers to consume everything they desire due to limited natural resources and the harmful effects of consumption, such as pollution and waste (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). Sustainably oriented consumers (in this thesis referred to as “sustainable consumers”) choose products communicated as having been produced in a sustainable manner and which have a smaller ecological impact than goods produced in a traditional (non-sustainable) manner (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002). Consumers who consume sustainable goods are not only trying to satisfy their personal needs and desires, but also to contribute to the welfare of society and the environment (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002). Sustainable consumption also encourages consumers to consume less products overall in order to conserve limited resources. Therefore, there is a conflict between sustainability desires and materialistic desires. Consumers must negotiate between these conflicting desires when making consumption decisions.

1.2. The Research Question

The main research question this thesis seeks to answer is: What does consumer discourse reveal about the way consumers negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainability desires?

This research question will be explored in the context of sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion incorporates many different elements, such as the use of organic and environmentally friendly materials, sustainable business models, fair working conditions, quality over quantity, slow fashion cycles, and transparency (Henninger et al., 2016). However, “[s]ustainable fashion has often been described as an oxymoron [...] as fashion assumes something goes in and out of style, which contrasts with the long-term perspective of sustainability” (Henninger et al., 2016, p. 403). It is possible, however, for clothing to be manufactured in a sustainable manner and still be considered fashion. There are also

different ways to consume fashion sustainably, for example, by purchasing second-hand clothing or utilizing clothes swaps. Sustainable consumption decisions generally feature a more selfless perspective as consumers are not only aiming to benefit the self. One of the reasons that consumers purchase sustainable fashion is “contribution to the welfare of society (such as reduced pollution, fair treatment of workers or no fur/leather use)” (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012, p. 177).

Consumers - even the sustainable ones - normally make fashion purchase decisions in order to benefit the self, for example, to display status, express identity or experience self-gratification (Niinimäki, 2010; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Harris et al., 2016). Due to this, materialistic desires often guide fashion consumption. This reveals the trade off consumers must consider between materialistic and sustainability desires when making fashion purchase decisions. For example, consumers may want to be sustainable whilst purchasing fashion that is still aesthetically pleasing, congruent with personal style, expressive of lifestyle, and suitably priced. Therefore, sustainable fashion offers an interesting context to study how consumers negotiate between materialistic values and sustainable values.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

Richins & Dawson (1992) identified three themes of materialism that guide the materialistic values and desires of consumers. These three themes are: acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success. These themes from Richins & Dawson (1992) have been used as an analytical framework for this thesis. The blog posts that were used as data for this thesis were analysed with regard to the themes identified by Richins & Dawson (1992) and the discourses pertaining to materialistic desires were identified based on the three themes. The presence of these themes indicates that the bloggers experience materialistic desires despite their commitment to sustainability.

Consumers’ ideology and ideals affect their decision making (Vehmas et al., 2018). Indeed, mass-mediated marketplace ideologies are one of the main streams of consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and this study is positioned in the stream of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies. Consumer ideology consists of systems of meaning

and consumers are thought of as interpretive agents who can engage in meaning-creating activities that enforce the dominant ideologies or engage in meaning-creating activities that deviate from these dominant ideologies (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

This thesis contributes to research on mass-mediated marketplace ideologies by examining how consumers negotiate between contradicting ideologies. Materialistic consumption desires are prevalent in the dominant mass-media environment and consumers are encouraged to fulfil their materialistic consumption desires. According to Kilbourne & Pickett (2008), materialistic lifestyles are increasing globally. However, sustainable fashion consumption is not mainstream and its ideology differs from the dominant materialistic ideology. Therefore, this thesis examines how consumers negotiate between these conflicting ideologies. The consumers studied in this thesis engage in meaning-creating activities that enforce the dominant ideologies as well as activities that deviate from the dominant ideology. This demonstrates how consumers can adopt contradictory ideologies by negotiating between their values.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis begins with a broad overview of the relevant previously-published literature. The thesis then moves on to the literature review, covering materialistic consumption, sustainable consumption, and the fashion system. The third section describes the qualitative research methodology used to investigate the research question. Discursive analysis is used to explore the discourses surrounding materialistic desires and sustainability desires. Sustainable fashion blogs have been chosen as a source for the discursive analysis.

The fourth section describes the findings based on the gathered data. The data revealed that the bloggers had materialistic desires and sustainability desires regarding fashion and that these desires created conflict. The bloggers attempted to resolve these conflicts in different ways. The findings discuss five themes that emerged from the data: 1) Possession-defined success 2) Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness 3) Acquisition centrality 4) Fast fashion and consumerism in opposition to sustainability and 5) Responsibilization. The fifth section provides a discussion of the findings followed by a conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Materialistic Consumption

There are many definitions of materialism and the concept has been examined through many different perspectives. However, this paper focuses on materialism as the "importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" (Belk, 1985, p. 265) and how consumers use consumption and possessions to satisfy their need for meaning (Richins, 1994). Consumers use goods to make statements about their values, personality, and aspirations – and so can be seen to base their identities on consumption (Solomon et al., 2016). Indeed,

“[m]any people use the notion of the consumer society in order to describe the current type of social organisation in the economically developed world. This is not only because we live in a world full of things, which we obviously do, but also because the most decisive step in the construction of consumer society is the new role of consumption activities.” (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 36)

In addition, a consumer culture describes the notion that a large portion of a society desires to consume goods for non-utilitarian reasons (as traditionally defined by economists), for example, for desires of novelty or status seeking (Richins & Dawson, 1992). “In Western societies, people consume more than needed for subsistence or comfort” (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 532). According to Niinimäki (2010), materialistic desires are a central part of our society and these desires affect consumers' identity formation and concept of self. An individual's personal values are also often reflected and characterized in the objects that they consider valuable to themselves (Richins, 1994). Therefore, materialism in this thesis represents an over-reliance on possessions to provide satisfaction and meaning in life; as well as attachment to, and desire to possess and consume goods for reasons unrelated to their utilitarian functionality to meet needs. From this perspective, over-consumption can be viewed as a materialistic form of consumption.

Materialism has been viewed as either a personal value or a social belief system within a society (Perera & Hewege, 2013). In Western societies excessive consumption is a normal behaviour. According to Belk (1985), at the highest levels of materialism, possessions are at the centre of a person's life and the individual believes possessions to be the greatest source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their life. Materialistic consumption desires are a "consumption-based orientation to happiness-seeking" (Ger & Belk, 1999, p. 184). When consumers rely excessively on material possessions for status seeking, pleasure seeking, self expression, or relationship definition, it is seen as materialism (Ger & Belk, 1999).

Richins & Dawson (1992) identified three themes of materialism, which reflect the materialistic values and desires of individuals. The first theme is acquisition centrality, in which the acquisition of possessions is at the centre of the consumer's life. In addition, material consumption provides the individual with a goal and a set of plans. In this way materialism gives consumers' lives meaning and "provides an aim for daily endeavours" (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 304). Materialistic consumers value possessions so highly that they can be viewed as worshipping possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992). The second theme is acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, in which possessions are viewed as being essential to leading a happy life and feeling satisfied. Highly materialistic individuals pursue happiness through consumption rather than through other means, for example, personal relationships or achievements (Richins & Dawson, 1992). When individuals consume in large quantities their goal is often self-satisfaction or pleasure (Richins & Dawson, 1992).

The third theme identified by Richins & Dawson (1992) is possession-defined success, in which consumers judge both others and themselves based on the number of possessions they own and the quality of the possessions they own. In addition, the value of possessions is not only measured by their ability to reflect status, "but from their ability to project a desired self-image and identify one as a participant in an imagined perfect life" (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 304). Therefore, materialistic individuals want their possessions to reflect their desired self-image and lifestyle. "Materialists view themselves as successful to the extent they can possess products that project these desired images" (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 304). Richins & Dawson (1992) also note that these three themes of

materialism were represented in the views of ordinary consumers, hence ordinary consumers view materialism in a similar way to the one presented by the study.

Richins & Dawson (1992) define materialism as a value. Specially, they write that

“[t]he organizing function of acquisition goals among materialists, the centrality of acquisition-related activities to their lives, and the prioritizing of possessions vis-a-vis other things in life suggests that materialism is a value.” (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 307)

According to their study, materialists use possessions and the acquisition of possessions as a means to reach desirable end states, such as happiness. Materialistic values and desires also guide the decisions that individuals make in a variety of situations, including consumption situations. Materialistic values and desires influence the quantity and type of goods purchased by consumers as well as the allocation of resources to purchase the good (Richins & Dawson, 1992). According to Richins (1994), consumers who are highly materialistic “are more conscious of the design, beauty, and other appearance features of the possessions they own” (Richins, 1994, p. 531). This is another factor that is likely to influence their consumption decisions.

2.2. Environmental Impacts of Materialism

Kilbourne & Pickett (2008) argue that materialistic lifestyles are becoming increasingly common globally. According to the study, materialism is institutionalized in American and other Western societies, and due to its dominance in these societies, individuals are rewarded for materialistic behaviours and lifestyles. Materialism is argued to be one of the main causes of environmental degradation because materialistic consumption causes problems, such as increased waste, pollution, and the depletion of resources (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). Kilbourne & Pickett (2008) also found a negative association between materialism and environmental beliefs. Joung (2013) found too that materialistic consumers in their study had lower scores on environmental attitudes than non-materialistic consumers, which indicates that materialists have less concern for the

environment and engage in less behaviour that is geared towards being environmentally friendly.

Joung's (2013) study also found that materialistic consumers tend to purchase more clothing than non-materialistic consumers and that they do not use all of the clothing they purchase. In addition, materialistic consumers tend to make more impulse purchases and hoard their clothing than non-materialistic consumers (Joung, 2013; Kassim et al., 2016). This is harmful to the environment because the excessive consumption wastes resources and creates textile waste that causes environmental degradation (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008).

According to Kilbourne & Pickett's (2008) study, consumers experience cognitive dissonance when they become aware that the fulfilment of their materialistic consumption desires is contributing to environmental degradation, if they do not want to identify as someone who harms the environment. According to the study, this cognitive dissonance is solved by reinforcing materialistic beliefs and decreasing perceptions of environmental degradation and problems related to consumption. Due to the dominance of materialistic beliefs and values in society, consumers are more encouraged to adopt materialistic beliefs rather than environmental beliefs (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008).

Consumers can also maintain a positive self-image as they continue to consume based on their materialistic values by distorting information related to the negative environmental impacts of their consumption habits (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). However, Kilbourne & Pickett (2008) conducted their study in America, which they identified as a country that promotes materialistic values. Therefore, the results could differ in a society where materialism is not widely accepted or promoted.

2.3. Sustainable Consumption and Sustainable Fashion

2.3.1. Sustainable Consumption

Despite the proliferation of materialistic consumption habits, there are also consumers who engage in sustainable consumption habits. However, sustainable consumption desires and

values differ from materialistic consumption desires and values, which causes consumers to feel conflict between these contradictory desires. Sustainable consumption can occur in many different domains of consumption and is not specific to any single industry, product or service. Sustainable consumption can be defined in different ways, however, the three most common definitions are:

*“[1.] an activity that can be continued indefinitely without causing harm;
[2.] doing unto others as you would have them do unto you;
[3.] and meeting a current generation’s needs without compromising those of future generations.”* (Joy et al., 2012, p. 274)

Sustainable consumption also encompasses the concept of ethical consumption, in which consumers display concern for society and other individuals in their consumption behaviours rather than exclusively attempting to fulfil their own needs and desires through consumption (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002; Henninger et al., 2016). For example, a sustainable consumer would value products that are made with fair labour where employees have good working conditions. Therefore, sustainable consumption contains an element of moral decision-making whereby consumers take into account the consequences of consumption on human well-being.

Sustainable consumption also pertains to consumption behaviours that are environmentally friendly and aim to reduce the environmental impact of consumption (Black & Cherrier, 2010). Sustainable consumption is often also referred to as “green consumption.” Examples of environmentally friendly behaviour that consumers can engage in includes recycling, purchasing organic food, purchasing green products, environmental petitions, and participating in environmental groups (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). Some consumers also engage in sustainable consumption because they are aware of the risks and impacts of climate change and want to minimize their own impact on climate change (Perera & Hewege, 2013).

According to Moisander & Pesonen (2002, p. 329) *“green consumers have typically been viewed as goal-oriented individuals who take into account the public (environmental)*

consequences (cost and benefits) of their private consumption in an attempt to bring about social change (sustainable development).”

Therefore, sustainable consumption values and desires are centred around consuming environmentally friendly and ethically made goods, consuming in a responsible manner, and considering the wider environmental and ethical impacts of consumption decisions. These values and desires differ from the values and desires of materialistic consumption. Due to this, consumers may experience conflict between their different desires whilst making consumption decisions. In order to engage in sustainable consumption a consumer must also consider factors that are not based solely on their personal preferences because they must assess how sustainable the product is (Moisander & Pesonen, 2002).

2.3.2. Sustainable Fashion

Fashion is one domain of consumption in which consumers can make sustainable consumption decisions. In this thesis, sustainable fashion has been selected as the context in which to study how consumers negotiate between materialistic consumption desires and sustainable consumption desires. Sustainable fashion can be defined as

“...an approach to the design, sourcing and manufacture of clothing which maximizes benefits to people and communities while minimizing impact on the environment.”
(Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012, p. 177).

Sustainable fashion has also been referred to by other terms, such as green fashion, eco-fashion and ethical fashion (Henninger et al., 2016). Sustainable fashion is also part of the concept of slow fashion, which focuses on slower production processes and rates of production, as well as empowering workers (Henninger et al., 2016). According to Henninger et al. (2016), sustainable production processes are related to both environmental and ethical concerns. The traditional fashion industry has created negative environmental impacts, which include chemicals, water use, energy consumption, dyes and greenhouse gas emissions (Vehmas et al., 2018).

Conversely, sustainable production processes related to the environment include renewable energy usage, reducing carbon generated during production, and using eco-friendly raw materials in order to reduce negative environmental impacts (Da Giau et al., 2016; Henninger et al., 2016). Sustainable production processes related to ethical treatment of workers and social sustainability include fair wages, labour rights, and safe working conditions (Henninger et al., 2016). In addition, sustainable fashion is focused on transparency, sustainable business models, slow fashion cycles, and quality over quantity (Henninger et al., 2016).

Sustainable fashion is however a complex phenomenon and “[c]reating sustainable clothing manufacturing, production, and retailing is a long and difficult processes” (Hill & Lee, 2015, p. 206). Fashion companies that aim to be sustainable must structure their entire production processes and business models around sustainability. Sustainability must be incorporated into every aspect of the business and not only one component of it. For example, a company utilizing organic materials for clothing manufacture whilst providing unethical and unsafe working conditions to workers would not be a truly sustainable company.

Hill & Lee (2015, p. 205) found that “consumers do view sustainable products as fitting with fast-fashion retailers, based on their previous knowledge and affect regarding the brand and the cause.” However, fast fashion companies manufacture and sell garments that are low-priced, low quality, disposable and manufactured at a high speed to create more trends and encourage more consumption (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Harris et al., 2016).

Sustainable fashion uses slow production cycles and creates high quality clothing (Henninger et al., 2016). The fashion industry has seen many scandals regarding human rights violations and the mistreatment of garment workers (Da Giau et al., 2016), but sustainable fashion companies remain committed to creating fair and safe working environments (Henninger et al., 2016). For such reasons, the business models and practices that fast fashion companies utilize are largely in opposition to the values and practices promoted by sustainable fashion. This highlights the complexity that consumers must

navigate when determining whether or not a company is using sustainable business practices, as well as the complexity for companies to ensure that they are fully committed to sustainable practices.

Similarly, consumers who wish to consume fashion sustainably should ideally incorporate sustainable consumption behaviours into all parts of their consumption. “Sustainable consumption as an aspect of consumer behaviour, involves pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase components” (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007, p. 211). Consumers aiming to consume fashion responsibly should purchase clothing from sustainable companies, use the clothing for a long period of time and dispose of it responsibly so as not to generate large amounts of textile waste. The sustainable consumption of fashion requires more of consumers than only buying certain brands that appear sustainable. The clothing life-cycle continues after purchase, with post-purchase behaviour impacting the environment.

The post-purchase laundering of clothing contributes up to 82% of the energy consumption that is associated with a specific piece of clothing (Harris et al., 2016). Goworek et al. (2012) claim that laundering clothes has the greatest environmental impact of fashion consumption and that consumers wash their clothes more often than is necessary for hygiene or health reasons. In addition, consumers are reluctant to repair clothing even though this would extend the life of the product (Goworek et al., 2012). This reluctance stems from consumers’ lack of sewing skills, lack of time, and the low cost of replacing garments once they show any signs of deterioration (Goworek et al., 2012). Consumers can decrease the environmental impacts of their clothing by laundering at lower temperatures, laundering less frequently, recycling clothes (Harris et al., 2016), and purchasing lower quantities of high quality clothing (Henninger et al., 2016). Sustainable consumption values are centred around these sustainable consumption behaviours and sustainable production methods.

2.3.3. Problems Related to Sustainable Fashion and its Consumption

The literature on sustainable fashion consumption is somewhat contradictory regarding the popularity and state of sustainable fashion. According to Da Giau et al. (2016), many fashion companies are becoming more ethical and environmentally friendly due to

increased consumer awareness of and demand for sustainable fashion. However, despite increased consumer interest, sustainable fashion still does not sell very well (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012; Henninger et al., 2016; Vehmas et al., 2018). In addition, Henninger et al. (2016) argue that different consumers understand sustainable fashion in different ways and that overall consumer awareness is still low. Hill & Lee (2015) also explain that consumers still lack a lot of information and knowledge about sustainability in apparel production.

Sustainable fashion has grown as an industry in response to increased consumer demand for ethically and environmentally friendly fashion (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). However, according to Cervellon & Wernerfelt (2012) sustainable fashion only accounted for 0.4 percent of the fashion market in the UK, which is one of Europe's strongest markets for sustainable fashion. However, sustainable fashion may have grown since Cervellon & Wernerfelt (2012) studied the phenomenon. Despite this, it is clear that even though sales of sustainable fashion have increased, the overall consumption of sustainable fashion is still relatively low compared to mainstream fashion and the majority of fashion brands do not have sustainability as their main focus.

There are many reasons as to why sustainable fashion has not yet become the norm in the fashion industry and there are many barriers that consumers face. In addition, "[c]onsumers' environmental or ethical concerns do not always translate into their purchasing behaviour" (Vehmas et al., 2018, p. 288). Although consumer demand for sustainable clothing appears to have increased, the actions of consumers do not support this notion (Goworek et al., 2012) as can be seen from the popularity of fast fashion clothing, large amounts of textile waste, and large quantities of purchased clothing. One of the most important factors that consumers consider in fashion is price (Vehmas et al., 2018; Niinimäki, 2010) and the generally higher prices of sustainable fashion can pose a barrier for consumers (Harris et al., 2016).

Style and quality are other factors that consumers find very important (Harris et al., 2016). Young consumers in particular are more focused on the fashionable qualities of clothing as opposed to the sustainability issues of clothing and "they separate fashion from

sustainability even if they definitely support the idea of it” (Vehmas et al., 2018, p. 288). Consumers also want fashion to be convenient to purchase and their interest in sustainable fashion does not outweigh their desire for convenience. According to Niinimäki (2010), consumers will only make ethical purchases if they do not experience extra costs or inconveniences in the form of higher prices, uncomfortable apparel materials or discomfort in their shopping experiences. Therefore, sustainability does not appear to be a primary focus in fashion for most consumers.

Furthermore, a lack of options for sustainable fashion acts as another barrier to consumers purchasing fashion items (Niinimäki, 2010). According to Hill & Lee (2015), even consumers who are focused on sustainability issues and concerned about sustainability in the fashion industry will ultimately make their purchase decision based on factors that meet their price, style, fit and quality desires. Consumers’ clothing purchase decisions are also largely determined by personal and economic factors even if consumers are committed to purchasing sustainable fashion (Harris et al., 2016). Additionally, most consumers, even the ones committed to sustainable fashion, limit their sustainable behaviours to the purchasing of clothing and lack interest or awareness of issues associated with sustainability during the other consumption phases and the care of clothing, such as laundering less frequently or mending broken clothes (Goworek et al., 2012; Harris et al., 2016).

There is also a lack of consensus on whether or not informing consumers about sustainability issues really changes their consumption behaviour. For example, Harris et al. (2016) point out that some consumers do not recycle their old clothing or purchase sustainable clothing despite being aware of environmental problems or child labour problems. In a study by Carrigan & Attalla (2001) some respondents said that increased information about ethical issues would change their behaviour, while other respondents said that it would not. Some respondents in the study also argued that receiving more information would only create more confusion and increased difficulty with choosing and buying products. In addition, there have been products that were launched as ethical choices in response to consumer demand for ethical products, however, the products then struggled because they did not generate enough demand from consumers (Carrigan &

Attalla, 2001). “Perhaps it is not that consumers do not care, but rather they care more about price, quality and value than corporate ethics” (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001, p. 566).

According to Harris et al. (2016), it is not enough to simply introduce sustainable fashion options into the fashion market and expect consumers to independently change their consumption behaviours and begin purchasing only sustainable fashion. Harris et al. (2016) proposed three reasons why this is the case. Firstly, sustainability in fashion is a very complex phenomenon that is difficult for consumers to fully comprehend, and consumers lack understanding and knowledge in this area. Secondly, different consumers are concerned about different facets of sustainability and it would be impractical to engage with all of these diverse concerns with all consumers. For example, some consumers care about animal welfare, others about avoiding sweat-shop labour, and others about environmentally friendly materials. Consumers also appear to be more interested in issues that directly affect them as opposed to issues that do not (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

The third reason proposed by Harris et al. (2016) is that “...clothing is not an altruistic purchase” (Harris et al., 2016, p. 312). Therefore, sustainability is not high on the list of criteria that clothing must possess when the majority of consumers make purchase decisions. Furthermore, consumers’ clothing disposal behaviours are largely driven by routines and habits even among consumers who are committed to sustainability (Harris et al., 2016). Due to this, new habits and routines must be introduced in order for consumers to consistently exhibit sustainable consumption habits.

Another problem facing consumers attempting to purchase more sustainable fashion is green-washing. Some companies use green-washing to mislead consumers about their sustainability efforts, which makes it more difficult for consumers to determine when companies are really engaging in sustainable practices (Henninger et al., 2016). This also makes it difficult for sustainable fashion companies to build trust with consumers who are sceptical about marketing and messages related to sustainability (Henninger et al., 2016).

2.4. The Fashion System and Materialistic Consumption

This paper examines how consumers negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainability desires in the context of fashion consumption, therefore, it is important to also investigate the fashion system and how materialistic desires emerge in the field of fashion. The fashion system is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon. People have used fashion to separate individuals into different categories, for example, by class or gender (Simmel, 1957). Fashion also simultaneously allows individuals to signal belonging to a group and differentiation as a unique individual (Simmel, 1957). Consumers desire individual identity, but also seek to conform to social norms (McNeill & Moore, 2015). According to Simmel (1957), fashion allows members of different groups to differentiate their group from other groups of people. This creates clear distinctions between different groups of consumers. Furthermore, many individuals imitate fashion trends in order to signal belonging to a group. This mode of group membership is easy for consumers to achieve because imitating fashion trends is easy. This is because

“[w]henever we imitate, we transfer not only the demand for creative activity, but also the responsibility for the action from ourselves to another. Thus the individual is freed from the worry of choosing and appears simply as a creature of the group, as a vessel of the social contents.” (Simmel, 1957, p. 542-543)

Meanings are encoded into clothing items and consumers use these clothing items for social definition (Harris et al., 2016). Cultural meanings are also embedded into fashion and new cultural meanings can even be created through the use of fashion (McCracken, 1986). Individuals then make judgements about others based on their clothing and fashion choices. Consumers construct and express their own identity through their clothing and fashion choices (Niinimäki, 2010; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consumers feel a need for identity creation and esteem and fashion is one way of satisfying this need. Individuals also feel that their clothes should reflect their character, values, and sense of self (Niinimäki, 2010). Therefore, when the self-image of a consumer changes this change may also be reflected in their clothing. Furthermore, individuals desire change and uniqueness, which they can achieve through changing fashion trends and adopting new styles (Simmel, 1957).

According to McNeill & Moore (2015), the desire to be considered fashionable is often more important to consumers than the desire to be sustainable or ethical with their fashion consumption. Consumers have basic needs, which they aim to satisfy through purchasing a product, however, consumers also have needs and desires for social status, identity construction, and association with specific lifestyles. "Lifestyle as a theoretical concept means the totality of a person's social practices, and the routines incorporated into habits, as well as the story that he/she tells about them" (Niinimäki, 2010, p. 152). Consumers can fulfil these desires through fashion consumption.

Materialistic desires are especially evident in the consumption of fashion. Consumers use fashion to signal, for example, identity, lifestyle, status, and personal values (Niinimäki, 2010; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Therefore, fashion is not consumed only for utilitarian purposes and consumers rely on these material possessions to create and signify meaning to others. According to Ertekin & Atik (2015, p. 54) "...the current fashion system, [is] driven by speed, change, artificial newness, obsolescence, disposable trends, and aesthetic fads..." This is especially evident with fast fashion because fast fashion retailers, such as H&M and Zara, expect consumers to use the garments sold less than ten times (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Therefore, fast fashion retailers do not aim to make clothes that are worn for a long time and instead create clothing with obsolescence built into them. In addition, the lower quality and durability of fast fashion clothing also makes them less viable to sell on the second-hand market (Harris et al., 2016).

According to Vehmas et al. (2018), eco-friendly clothes are still not selling well despite increased awareness and demand. In addition, fast fashion brands have grown rapidly and remain very popular among consumers. Leading fast fashion brands, for example, H&M, Zara and Forever 21, are growing more rapidly than the entire fashion and apparel industry (Bain, 2016). The fast fashion brand Zara has over 2,000 stores worldwide (Singh, 2017). During 2016 H&M opened 427 new stores around the world and their sales rose by 6% (Wahba, 2017). H&M is "one of the largest fashion retailers in the world" (Wahba, 2017) and the company operates on the basis of a fast fashion retailer.

Fast fashion business models encourage consumers to buy low-cost “throwaway goods” (Vehmas et al., 2018, p. 287) and shorter production cycles create increased desire for consumers to change their styles frequently as there are more styles for them to choose from. Some department store brands and designer labels are also trying to compete with fast fashion by offering more rapidly changing collections to appeal to customers (Bain, 2016). This highlights the popularity of fast fashion retailers and their rising sales numbers and increasing number of retail stores indicate that the majority of consumers have not opted out of purchasing fast fashion in favour of fashion brands that are centred around sustainability. Therefore, the phenomenon of sustainable fashion is still very relevant and it is clear that most consumers are not devoted to shopping exclusively in sustainable fashion.

In addition, participants in a study by Birtwistle & Moore (2007) were cognizant of the fact that they owned excessive amounts of clothing, however, this did not motivate them to change their fashion consumption behaviours drastically. These consumers felt more motivated to donate old clothing, however, they did not reduce their purchasing of new clothes and did not have a lot of interest in the ethical or environmental impacts of their fashion consumption decisions (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Consumers purchase high quantities of fast fashion clothing, which they also dispose of in large quantities in order to keep purchasing new fashion items (Goworek et al., 2012).

These fashion consumption decisions are, therefore, found to be driven by materialistic desires to possess large quantities of clothing, be viewed as fashionable, and fulfil consumer desires for new and trendy clothes. Additionally, a study by Joy et al. (2012) showed that the participants of the study did not consider the environmental and social impact of their fashion purchases even though they were concerned about the environmental and social impact of their purchases in other domains of consumption. Therefore, materialistic values and desires guide the fashion consumption behaviours of many consumers.

Furthermore, clothing disposal is an important sustainability issue. Fast fashion fuels high volumes of clothing purchases. For example, in the UK there are approximately one

million tonnes of clothing that are discarded annually (Goworek et al., 2012). In a study by Goworek et al. (2012), one participant reported having purchased 16 new tops for a holiday and then having discarded all of them prior to returning home. This example demonstrates the attitude that many consumers have towards clothing, especially fast fashion, which is generally viewed as disposable or throwaway clothes (Goworek et al., 2012; Vehmas et al., 2018).

In a similar vein, Joy et al. (2012) found that participants in their study “exhibited relatively little guilt about fast fashion’s disposability, seeing little discrepancy between their attitudes toward sustainability and their fashion choices” (Joy et al., 2012, p. 280). Fast fashion is a profitable business, which allows consumers to satisfy their desires for trendiness and frequent garment purchases, however, poses ethical and sustainability issues. According to Ertekin & Atik (2015, p. 55) “...fast fashion is not motivated only by speed of production, but also by the greed of both buyers and sellers.”

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Paradigm

This paper utilizes qualitative research methods to investigate sustainable fashion consumption within the context of sustainable fashion blogs. This section explains the research paradigm utilized in this paper as well as the philosophical underpinnings through an examination of the ontology, epistemology, and axiology of the research. This section also describes the data collection and analysis methods used for this research paper. A research paradigm guides the work of a researcher by offering them a system of belief or guiding worldview (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). This paper utilizes a constructivist paradigm. In this paradigm it is assumed that reality is socially constructed through language and shared meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011).

Ontology refers to the nature of reality that is being studied (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). This paper utilizes a constructionist ontology because reality is treated as a subjective rather than objective construct. A constructionist ontology assumes that reality is socially constructed and there are multiple realities (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Reality is based on the individual's social and cognitive processes and their interpretations of what constitutes reality, therefore, reality is also context-dependent (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011).

Epistemology is concerned with defining how knowledge is produced and how it can be argued for (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). This paper utilizes a constructionist epistemology because reality is not viewed as being objective in nature or consisting of objective knowledge. Instead this paper assumes that we access the world and produce knowledge through our own observations and interpretations. Therefore, reality is dynamic and individually constructed, and it can only be accessed through social constructions, such as language and shared meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Therefore, knowledge is made available through social actors (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011).

The axiological aim of this research is to understand rather than predict a phenomenon. Therefore, this paper assumes a constructionist axiology. This paper seeks to understand how consumers negotiate between materialistic and sustainability desires in the domain of

fashion. This paper uses the blogs of sustainable fashion bloggers to better understand the phenomenon of sustainable fashion consumption.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

The data for this paper is collected from sustainable fashion blogs. Blogs were chosen as the data source because they provide a lot of material for the discursive analysis. In addition, there are other benefits to examining blogs to gauge consumer attitudes towards sustainable fashion. According to Niinimäki (2010, p. 156)

“...it is difficult to study consumer attitudes regarding ethicality, as consumers tend to give more positive answers than their actual consumption and purchasing behaviour reveals. Consumers give socially desirable or ‘correct’ answers rather than truthful ones.”

The discourse contained in blogs is dictated by the author of the blog and their opinions and views are presumably reflected in their blog posts. Therefore, blogs offer an appropriate data collection method to study existing discourses that reflect the ideas, values, and opinions of the bloggers. Sustainable fashion bloggers have an apparent interest in and commitment to sustainable fashion. Studying these consumers who have overcome the barriers to sustainable fashion consumption may yield a new perspective that is lacking in previous studies that measure the attitudes and behaviours of random samples of consumers who may or may not honestly care about sustainability issues. In addition, due to the bloggers’ interest in fashion and their exposure to materialistic values surrounding fashion, it was highly likely that these bloggers had to engage in negotiations between their sustainability and materialistic desires.

3.3. Selection of Blogs

A list of blog posts was initially selected through the Greenmatch website (www.greenmatch.co.uk) and then further selection criteria was developed in order to narrow down the list of analyzed blogs. Greenmatch is a website focused on sustainability and the Greenmatch blog covers a range of topics related to sustainability, for example, sustainable energy, climate change and sustainable fashion. The Greenmatch blog has a

blog post that provides a list of sustainable fashion blogs that Greenmatch awarded with a “Go Slow Award 2016.” According to the blog post these rewards “acknowledge and reward fashion bloggers that focus on sustainable fashion and really put time and effort in inspiring others in a creative manner” (www.greenmatch.co.uk). This list of sustainable fashion blogs was used to find an initial list of possible blogs to examine. The blogs on Greenmatch were divided into five categories: the guides, the spotters, the designers, the behind the scene-ers, and the buzz creators.

Six criteria were used to select the final selection of blogs out of the fifty available blogs:

1. The blogs must have blog posts that focus on sustainable fashion in particular. Some blogs discuss multiple topics related to sustainability and feature different categories (for example, sustainable beauty, and sustainable lifestyle). In this case, only blog posts related to sustainable fashion were included in the data set for analysis.
2. The blogs must be current and available for access. Several blogs had been removed or the bloggers announced that they had decided to discontinue their blogs. These blogs were discarded because they either no longer provided access or access was not guaranteed in the future.
3. The authors of the blogs are consumers of sustainable fashion and not fashion designers. Several blogs on the Greenmatch website were run by fashion designers whose aim was to promote their own fashion brands as well as spread awareness of sustainability issues. These blogs were removed from the data set because fashion designers do not have the same knowledge and interests as average consumers who purchase sustainable fashion. Fashion designers are also likely to be concerned about different issues than fashion consumers.
4. The blog posts needed to contain written content that could be informatively analyzed through the discursive analysis. Some blogs simply featured images and brand names and these blogs were discarded from the analysis due to their lack of written content.
5. The blogs needed to contain relevant information about the consumption of sustainable fashion. Some blogs were largely focused on sewing clothes and these blogs were also discarded from the analysis because although the practice of

sewing your own clothes can be regarded as sustainable behaviour, the blogs were focused on the technical skills and aspects of making clothes rather than on the issue of sustainability. Therefore, they did not provide relevant information for this analysis.

6. At least one blog from each of Greenmatch's five categories was included, with the exception of the category "the designers" as fashion designers were excluded from the analysis. Choosing at least one blog from each of the remaining four categories allowed for a broad range within the blogs whilst adhering to the other selection criteria.

Once blogs that did not meet the six specified criteria had been eliminated, the blogs were ranked according to their website traffic on the website www.similarweb.com. The blogs do not directly display the number of viewers they receive, therefore, website traffic was used as a measure of their popularity among consumers. The ten blogs with the highest rankings were selected for the final analysis. A list of these selected blogs including their name, address and ranking is available in Appendix 1.

Blogs that did not have a ranking on similarweb.com were not included in the analysis because their popularity could not be compared with other blogs. The blogs that have the highest website traffic have the most visitors and thus, are more interesting to readers. This means that the information and other content on these blogs is more likely to be relevant to other consumers. One limitation of this method is that it is not possible to infer from the rankings which blog topic (if the blog discusses multiple topics) is the most popular and has the most readers. Despite this limitation, using website traffic rankings was deemed an adequate method to compare the popularity of blogs.

3.4. Data Analysis: Discursive Analysis

The data was analyzed via discursive analysis. This type of analysis provides a method for analyzing meaning through discourse. Discourse analyses can examine any type of discourse, for example, conversations, news articles or personal journals. This paper examines the discourse within sustainable fashion blogs. Discourse analysis is not the study of linguistics, but rather the study of social actions that are mediated through the use

of language (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Therefore, this paper will not examine the linguistics of the blog posts, but rather the meanings that are constructed through the texts.

According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2011), language practices mediate cultural meanings and these cultural meanings can be studied through discursive analysis. Furthermore, discourses can be viewed as systems of representation that produce meaning through the use of language and signifying practice – systems which

“...consist of the words, concepts, ideas, images, classifications, norms, values, role expectations and signifying practices that are used to refer to and represent knowledge about objects, people and events of all sorts.” (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006, p. 194)

Furthermore, this paper takes the perspective that language is actually used to construct reality rather than simply mirror reality. Meaning is discursively constructed and depends on the frameworks, context, available discourses and representational systems of individuals (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Meaning does not simply exist in the world without interpretation and a single object may have multiple meanings. In addition, meanings can change over time or in different contexts.

Blog posts can be categorised as naturally occurring discursive texts. According to Moisander & Valtonen (2006, p. 69), these naturally occurring texts show “cultural discourses and discursive practices through which social reality is produced and everyday practices are organized in those settings.” Naturally occurring discursive texts can be important data sources and can yield more appropriate data than interviews (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). However, the discursive practices of individuals also reveals how they manage their image and present themselves (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). It can be assumed that the bloggers still want to present themselves in a positive view to their readers, which could affect their blogs.

The bloggers occasionally receive free items from brands or make a profit from link referrals on their blogs, therefore, there is also some monetary incentive for the bloggers to

blog about certain brands or companies. This is a limitation that has been taken into account in this thesis. The bloggers do state that all their opinions are their own despite the monetary benefits they may receive and this paper assumes that all the text written by the bloggers is their own work. The contents of the blog posts still provide valuable data for discursive analysis despite the limitation that bloggers may be influenced to discuss and promote certain brands for their own benefit. The phenomenon of fashion bloggers receiving benefits from brands is also common within the fashion blogging sphere and is not unique to sustainable fashion blogging. In addition, the bloggers appear to be genuinely committed to sustainable fashion regardless of which brands they recommend to readers and often bloggers discuss more sustainability related topics than single brands or products.

The three themes of materialism as defined by Richins & Dawson (1992) were used as an analytical framework in this thesis. The blog posts were analyzed for content that fits into the themes of materialism and this content was identified as materialistic discourse. This made it possible to identify materialistic desires and values that the bloggers were expressing because these desires were congruent with previous research on materialistic consumption. These materialistic desires were then analyzed to discern how they conflicted with sustainability desires, as well as how the bloggers dealt with this conflict.

4. Findings

Five different themes emerged from the research: 1. Possession-defined success 2. Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness 3. Acquisition centrality 4. Fast fashion and consumerism 5. Responsibilization. Each of these themes reflects a discourse that arose from the blogs researched. The discourses exhibit a conflict between the materialistic desires and sustainability desires of the bloggers. The discourses also reveal ways that the bloggers negotiate between their conflicting materialistic and sustainability desires. The themes, conflicts and negotiations are summarized in Table 1 below and explored in more detail later in this section.

Table 1: Main findings with central themes, conflicts and negotiations

Theme	Conflict	Negotiation
Possession-defined success	When an individual's self-identity and desired expressed identity are strongly linked to and created by possessions, the individual must keep acquiring new possessions and discarding old possessions if they experience a change in their self-identity. This conflicts with the sustainability idea of using possessions as long as possible and avoiding unnecessary purchases.	Only purchasing sustainably made fashion items to reduce negative impacts of new purchases. Cultivating the "conscious consumer" identity where sustainable consumption is a key definer in sense of self and is linked to sustainable consumption.
Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness	Bloggers derive happiness from possessions and encourage other consumers to purchase items that make them happy. This can lead to over-consumption and unnecessary purchases as consumers desire to purchase new products to feel a renewed sense of happiness.	The bloggers try to maximize the amount of joy they get from their items, limit new purchases to items that bring them a lot of happiness, and form bonds with their possessions, which helps them use the items for a longer period.
Acquisition centrality	The bloggers enjoy getting new fashion items and still make purchases for non-utilitarian reasons. Some bloggers also have the acquisition of new items as a long-term goal. This conflicts with the sustainability idea of	The bloggers try to limit the number of new items they purchase, avoid impulse purchasing, find sustainable ways to purchase new items, and make sure to use the items they purchase in order to avoid wasting

	only purchasing necessary items and curbing the desire for new items.	them.
Fast fashion and consumerism	Fast fashion does not follow the principles of sustainable production and encourages over-consumption. The ideology of consumerism as discussed by the bloggers acts as an extreme of materialism that is seen in direct opposition to sustainability.	The bloggers cannot negotiate between consumerism and sustainability. The bloggers encourage readers to avoid fast fashion and consumerism entirely. The extreme materialism of consumerism makes their own materialistic consumption appear less severe.
Responsibilization	A sustainable consumer may feel a materialistic desire to consume, however, lacks the information to make an informed decision about whether or not their consumption behaviour is sustainable.	Consumers may purchase new items and fulfil their materialistic desires if they first expend time and effort into researching the items in order to ensure that they are sustainably produced. The bloggers responsabilize consumers to make responsible and sustainable consumption decisions, which combat consumerism.

4.1. Possession-defined Success

The first theme identified in the blogs is the meaning of fashion. The bloggers have a clear interest in fashion as evidenced by the fact that they have dedicated their time and effort into creating blog posts about the topic. However, fashion has importance to these bloggers that goes beyond mere interest or a hobby. The bloggers care deeply about fashion and use fashion as an expression of their identity and values. This can be tied into possession-defined success, one of the themes of materialism discussed by Richins & Dawson (1992). According to Richins & Dawson (1992) materialistic individuals judge themselves and others based on their possessions, and they also want their possessions to be a reflection of their desired lifestyle and identity.

Another facet of materialism is when consumers excessively rely on possessions to express their identity and status (Ger & Belk, 1999). Therefore, when consumers heavily rely on their possessions to construct and express their identity and desired lifestyle, it can be viewed as materialistic behaviour. In the blogs examined for this paper, sustainable fashion consumption is also symbolic of the bloggers' identities as conscious consumers. In

addition to these symbolic representations, the bloggers are also focused on sustainable fashion as aesthetically pleasing and fulfilling their materialistic fashion desires for stylish and beautiful clothes. According to Richins (1994), consumers with materialistic values are more concerned with the appearance features and aesthetics of their possessions. Therefore, the desire to own stylish and beautiful clothing is a materialistic desire.

4.1.1. Fashion as a Reflection of Identity and Values

The bloggers perceive of fashion as a way to express themselves in terms of their individual identity as well as their current and aspirational lifestyle. The bloggers want their clothes to be reflective of who they are as a person. For example, one of the bloggers wrote:

“Clothing is one of the major ways we express ourselves. It hints at what our values may be and how we connect to the world. From the material (natural or synthetic), to production (fair or slave labour) to how we treat our garments (with care or landfill), each piece offers a subtle clue about who we are.” (Eco Boost, 29.01.2018)

This quote demonstrates that clothing is an important form of self-expression for the blogger. The quote also implies that clothing carries a message about its wearer whether or not the wearer intended to send that particular message. Materialistic individuals use their possessions to judge others and also expect to be judged based on their own possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Therefore, it is a materialistic desire to possess items that reflect a desired image of the self to others. The blogger of The Sustainable Edit writes in one post:

“Personal style isn’t just about the clothes we wear it’s about showing the world who we are. ...Our outfit is often the first thing people see when they meet us and it should give the right first impression.” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.06.2018)

The Sustainable Edit demonstrates the expectation of being judged by others based on the clothes that an individual wears. The blogger also subtly tells her readers that they should use their outfits to cultivate an image of themselves that gives off a good first impression.

The bloggers also indicate that clothing and fashion should be an expression of an individual's self-identity. For example, one blogger wrote:

“But this mini evolution [regarding her clothes] has been about a lot more than just style. Through considering my personal style and how I want to represent myself to the world I’ve discovered a little more about me as a person. My style has become more of an expression of who I am as a person. It is now less about meeting the expectations of others or aesthetic of a minimalist capsule wardrobe. It is now about using the way I dress to help me show up how I want to show up.”
(The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018)

The above is a clear demonstration that the blogger uses clothing to define and represent herself as an individual. In addition, clothing impacts the way that the blogger views herself. She went on to say:

“When I get dressed for these days I want to feel professional, capable, approachable as well as fun, playful and feminine. But my current wardrobe wasn’t making me feel like this.” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018)

The blogger shows that whilst clothing can be used to represent oneself externally it also impacts how the individual perceives themselves internally. The blogger in the above quote had a specific identity that she wanted to both internally identify with as well as externally express to others. Because her clothing did not externally express this identity she did not internally feel like she fully identified as the type of person that she wanted to be.

Therefore, clothing not only signals to others who a person is, but also signals to themselves what kind of person they appear to be. The blogger of The Sustainable Edit uses clothing in order to express her identity to a very large degree. The blogger appears to

rely excessively on her clothing to make her feel like the kind of person that she wants to be, which indicates that a person's possessions can not only reflect their identity, but also construct their identity. This is an example of materialistic desires being satisfied through the possession of clothing that communicates carefully curated or 'correct' meanings about their owner. These meanings are communicated to both the owner of the possessions as well as other individuals who see them.

This reliance on possession-defined success creates conflict between materialistic desires and sustainable desires because the identity of the individual is tied to the possessions they own. If the individual undergoes personal growth or a change in lifestyle then they will not feel that their personal development is complete unless they gain new possessions that showcase the change in their perceived identity. This conflicts with the sustainability value of using possessions as long as they are viable for use and avoiding purchases that are not necessary.

The blogger of The Sustainable Edit felt that she had grown as a person and she needed to change her wardrobe in order to reflect this change because her old clothing did not reflect her new sense of self. Discarding old clothing that is still in good condition and purchasing new clothing for purposes of self-expression is an example of behaviour that is spurred by materialistic desires for possession-defined success. The conflict between materialistic and sustainable desires is also visible on other blogs, for example:

"I'm taking a step back to heed a warning: buying from the brands I cover when you don't need clothes – or worse, when you won't actually wear them – defeats the purpose of ethical fashion. Ethical brands exist for when our closets are void of something, not for when we feel like shopping as a pastime. I'm not saying clothes should be bland and uniform, quite the contrary actually. Clothes should make us feel like the best version of ourselves, as long as our 'selves' don't have multiple personality disorder." (The Peahen, 30.05.2016)

This blogger writes that clothing should make an individual feel like "the best version" of themselves, which indicates that clothes are powerful indicators of how the individual

views and feels about themselves. However, this desire to use clothing to cultivate a desirable personal image should not come at the cost of sustainable behaviour. The blogger also acknowledges the fact that purchasing unnecessary or useless clothing from sustainable brands is not actually sustainable consumption behaviour. Purchasing clothing that will not be worn wastes resources even if the clothing was produced with ethical or environmentally friendly methods. Therefore, individuals who wish to fulfil their materialistic desires for self-expressive clothing as well as their sustainability desires must negotiate between these desires by only purchasing clothes that they are certain to wear and have use for.

Another blogger also addresses the issue of changing tastes and styles by writing:

“Sustainable fashion requires us to re-imagine our relationship to our clothing. We need to be able to leave behind craving for new and more items, and instead invest in fewer high quality pieces that are timeless. That doesn’t mean that our wardrobes can’t evolve as our tastes do, but we need to allow this to happen as a process of natural attrition rather than one of wardrobe expansion.” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018)

The blog post in Tortoise and Lady Grey demonstrates that the blogger thinks it is acceptable for an individual’s clothing tastes to change and that this change can be reflected in their wardrobe. However, the materialistic desire for new clothing that accords with this change in taste must be negotiated with sustainable values. This blogger feels that the individual should invest in clothing items that are high quality and timeless, which maximizes the amount of time they are used and reduces waste.

According to Tortoise and Lady Grey, consumers should also refrain from purchasing a lot of clothes at once and instead changing their style slowly over time. Further in the blog post from Tortoise and Lady Grey the blogger also offers readers another method to negotiate between their materialistic desire to acquire new clothing that better fits their current clothing desires and their sustainability desires. The blogger suggests that readers try to be more creative with the way they style and match their current clothes in order to

find new ways of wearing old clothes and thus, creating a new image without needing to purchase more fashion items.

In a previously mentioned quote from Eco Boost (29.01.2018) the blogger also mentions that clothing is indicative of the values that a person holds and that these values are conveyed to others through clothing. According to the blogger,

“[c]lothing is one of the major ways we express ourselves. It hints at what our values may be and how we connect to the world.” (Eco Boost 29.01.2018)

The values conveyed through clothing are very expansive and act as a measure of how sustainably the wearer is dressed by indicating for example, whether they support “fair or slave labour” (Eco Boost, 29.01.2018). For the bloggers examined in this paper, these values are often linked to sustainable values. Therefore, fashion is aiding the bloggers in expressing their sustainable values through their possessions. This can be seen, for example, in the excerpts from blog posts below:

“I love when a curated marketplace includes both men and women. So many of you have husbands and partners to shop for, and you prefer to use your values when shopping for them, too.” (Sustainably Chic, 11.02.2019)

“Cut through the greenwash, understand the nuance, and choose textiles confidently in alignment with your personal values. Whether your core concern is animal rights, water use, or combating deforestation.” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 17.10.2018)

The bloggers instruct their readers to make purchasing decisions that are aligned with their values, which implies that the bloggers think it is important for values to be reflected in the consumption of fashion. The blogger of Sustainably Chic implies that sustainable consumers use their values to make purchasing decisions when obtaining items for themselves, and that these same values should guide all their other purchasing decisions when buying items for other people also. This demonstrates that sustainable consumers

should be guided by sustainable values in all their purchases. The blogger of Tortoise and Lady Grey also instructs readers to choose textiles that are aligned with personal values, and the values that she lists are related to sustainability. This implies that sustainable values are important to her and she assumes that they are important to the readers of her sustainable fashion blog. This idea is also reflected by another blogger in a blog post where the author examined the sustainability of vegan leather alternatives as well as animal leather. The blogger wrote in the post:

“After doing all this research and considering all sides (and materials), I would ultimately say that this decision is up to you and your own style, needs, and values. If you gag at the thought of wearing animal skin but want a classic look, go for sustainably-made PU vegan leather. If you are a proud vegan and environmentalist, then pick up something made with Piñatex. If you are a capsule wardrobe, #30wears, and/or vintage fashion gal, then get yourself some vegetable-tanned, artisan-made, or secondhand leather accessories. ...The point is, I will brook no judgmental pronouncements from the vegan or non-vegan side of this debate on shoppers who pause to buy leather or faux-leather goods thoughtfully . These are all suitable choices for a conscious consumer.” (Eco Cult, 04.02.2019)

This quote demonstrates that the blogger believes there are different ways to purchase fashion sustainably and there is some variance in the values related to sustainable consumption. However, despite small differences in which sustainable values the consumer holds, each consumer should make purchases that are in line with their values. In addition, fashion sends a message that can be easily seen and interpreted by others without the wearer having to explicitly tell others about their values. According to a post on Eco Cult,

“...maybe this texture thing is actually good for Piñatex, because I actually can see it becoming a vegan status symbol, a way for someone to tell you they’re vegan without ever opening their mouth.” (Eco Cult, 04.02.2019)

In the above example the clothes speak for themselves and express something about the wearer. Clothes can also be used to express status or identity, which is one of the aspects of

possession-defined success. In this case being vegan is viewed as an attribute that is worthy of higher status. The bloggers view clothing as a means of expression and want others to see their sustainable values through their clothing. Therefore, they are relying on their material possessions to communicate to others what kind of person they are and what kind of values they hold. However, despite the materialistic nature of this desire, they strive to be sustainable consumers and want to communicate their sustainable values to other consumers.

4.1.2. The Conscious Consumer Identity

The bloggers use fashion as a tool for expressing their ‘true self’, values and identity. A recurrent theme throughout the blogs was the identity of the ‘conscious consumer.’ Some bloggers explicitly discuss the concept of conscious consumption or label themselves as conscious consumers whilst others implicitly discuss conscious consumption and ways that they are acting as conscious consumers. Cultivating the identity of the conscious consumer also allows the bloggers to negotiate between their materialistic desires and sustainability desires because this identity is rooted in being both a consumer and a sustainable individual. By purchasing sustainable fashion the bloggers are able to satisfy their materialistic desires for possession-defined success whilst also adhering to their sustainability values. The principles of being a conscious consumer guide the consumption decisions that the bloggers make.

“I had read so much about alpacas as a conscious fashion consumer.” (Eco Cult, 08.12.2018)

“I’ve been following them [Rapanui] for a while, geeking out about their low-waste printing process, their closed loop take-back scheme, the fact that they use GOTS certified organic cotton for all of their products and that each piece is made to order, so no surplus lying around waiting to be sold.” (Eco Boost, 02.07.2018)

In the post from Eco Cult (08.12.2018) the blogger explicitly referred to herself with the term “conscious fashion consumer.” The blogs make it clear that conscious consumers should be informed about sustainable fashion issues. In the above quote from Eco Cult the

blogger tells her audience that she has read widely on the subject being discussed and indicates that this is something other conscious consumers should also do. The post from Eco Boost (02.07.2018) demonstrates that the blogger is highly familiar with the brand Rapanui that she is discussing and implies that she conducted a fair amount of research to learn about the company. She also uses the term “geeking out” to express that she is highly interested in the topic and is excited to learn more about it and share her information with others. In addition to enforcing the idea of the conscious consumer as someone who is informed and interested in finding information related to the sustainability issues, the bloggers display themselves as a credible source of information to others due to the fact that they have done research into sustainable fashion and different fashion brands.

Another important aspect of being a conscious consumer is to make informed purchase decisions based on information about brands and the sustainability of their products. This is demonstrated by a quote from the blog Plein Vanity:

“Conscious shopping may be a strange concept for many, but at its core remains a simple approach when using your purchasing power: having a more active shopping experience, through more informed and mindful decisions. Conscious consumers are actively aware of their purchases, consider the transparency and social impact of companies, and focus on the long-term or “big picture” effects of purchases.” (Plein Vanity, 29.01.2018)

The above quote demonstrates that the conscious consumer should affect change through their purchasing power and make informed decisions about what products they consume. The conscious consumer should take into consideration social and environmental concerns, and not only their own desires, when purchasing new products. The use of the term “big picture effects” implies that consumers must take a wide range of elements into consideration before making a purchase decision. The consumer must also conduct their own research in order to make the most informed decisions possible. Conscious consumers

“...actively and wholeheartedly like to get dirty with the backstories—a brand’s mission, a founder’s story, sourcing choices, or ingredient lists. Any evidence or

information available is helpful and welcome to conscious consumers because they take the initiative to familiarize themselves with the ins and outs of products and brands to not only better inform purchasing decisions, but to understand the full picture.” (Plein Vanity, 29.01.2018)

According to Richins & Dawson (1992), materialism influences the allocation of resources on possession acquisition and it appears that the bloggers spend a lot of time in deciding which products to purchase. However, a lot of this time is spent vetting the sustainable practices of the companies to ensure that they are sustainably produced and that the company is not using green-washing to appear more sustainable than it really is. Therefore, although the bloggers devote a lot of their time to consumption-related activities, such as researching new potential products to purchase, this time is also spent ensuring that the products are in accordance with their sustainability values.

Conscious consumers also make considered purchase decisions and do not purchase new items based on impulse. One blogger writes:

“I’ve had my eye on these for well over a year and finally decided to treat myself to a pair of vela sneakers a few months ago. No impulse purchasing here, folks!” (Eco Boost, 07.06.2017)

This quote from Eco Boost implies that impulse purchasing is a negative act that should be avoided. The blogger demonstrates that she put a lot of thought into her purchase before finally making a decision and in this way is not purchasing needless fashion items. The idea of thoughtful purchasing is also related to the idea of only purchasing products that the individual needs or will use a lot. Overconsumption opposes the values of the conscious consumer and the bloggers advocate against overconsumption. For example, one blogger states:

“A big part of my work (and travel) involves not over-consuming or buying things I don’t need or won’t actually use.” (Eco Cult, 08.11.2018)

This quote demonstrates how much the blogger values not over-consuming products. She states that it is a “big part” of her work. Generally traditional fashion bloggers aim to have a large variety of clothes and appear to purchase new clothes often, however, this is the opposite case for sustainable fashion bloggers who aim to purchase only clothes that they need or will use regularly. In order to achieve this aim, the sustainable bloggers cannot fulfil all their materialistic desires to purchase more fashion items. However, they use the fashion items that they purchase to signal their sustainable values to other consumers.

Therefore, many of the bloggers examined in this paper have curated for themselves the identity of the conscious consumer. This identity is rooted in being a sustainable consumer who makes thoughtful purchases, does not over-consume, and considers the environmental and social impacts of their consumption decisions. However, the bloggers also communicate that fashion is an important tool for self-expression, as discussed earlier in this paper. Therefore, they also use their possessions to communicate to others that they are a conscious consumer. In this way the bloggers negotiate between their materialistic desires to consume products that express their self-identity, and their sustainability desires to consume in a way that does less harm to the environment and society than traditionally produced products. This demonstrates that conscious consumers can still meet their materialistic desires for possession-defined success whilst purchasing sustainably produced products and making conscious consumption decisions.

4.2. Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness

Another theme of materialism is acquisition as the pursuit of happiness. Materialists use possessions as a primary source of happiness and pursue happiness through consumption rather than happiness through other means (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Therefore, using possessions and consumption in order to experience happiness and joy can be viewed as a materialistic desire. The blogs do not convey how much the bloggers use fashion as a source of happiness compared to other aspects in their life, however they do make it clear that fashion both is and should be considered a source of joy. The bloggers do not only consume clothing based on their utilitarian needs for clothing. The bloggers choose clothes that give them feelings of happiness and joy. However, they do only consume fashion that

is sustainable. Therefore, even though the bloggers aim to fulfil their materialistic desire of pursuing happiness through fashion consumption, they only consume sustainable fashion.

“Your wardrobe should be a place of joy and inspiration and you shouldn’t feel fed up or bored every morning when you go to get dressed.” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.06.2018)

This quote demonstrates that the blogger regards her clothes as a source of joy and she thinks that everyone should feel a sense of joy from their clothes. In another post the blogger discusses her capsule wardrobe (a wardrobe with a limited number of items of clothing that generally consists of basics that are worn on constant rotation). The blogger explains that she did not feel a sense of happiness from this kind of wardrobe. In the post she wrote:

“I found myself so incredibly bored with my wardrobe and was desperate for change...There was nothing wrong with the outfits I was creating but they just didn’t feel exciting or interesting to me. Everything felt dull and boring. (I hate using negative words like dull or boring but this was how I was feeling about the clothes in my wardrobe.” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018)

These quotes demonstrate that it is very important for the blogger to feel excited by her outfits, and that a dull and boring wardrobe is a highly negative aspect for her. In the blog post she said that she was “desperate” to change her clothing collection, which implies that she had a very strong emotional reaction to her boring outfits. Indeed the blogger also states in her blog post:

“Making the decision to move on from the capsule wardrobe gave me a sense of freedom and the opportunity to probably [sic] explore my personal style. Removing the rules and guidelines I had for my wardrobe has given me the space to play and have a little fun with my clothes.” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018)

Therefore, the blogger feels that clothing should bring their wearer joy and when she realized her own clothing was no longer a source of joy for her she decided to change her style and acquire clothing that did bring her joy. This is an example of how clothing is consumed for the purpose of bringing happiness to the consumer. This also illustrates how the emotional (rather than utilitarian) function of clothing is very important to the blogger as a consumer. In the case of the blogger from The Sustainable Edit, the emotional function of her clothing was even more important to her than their utilitarian function because her “boring” clothes were not worn-out or otherwise unusable. Therefore, the reason she desired new clothing items was because her old clothes were unable to bring her a sense of joy. Due to this, she depended on her possessions to provide her with feelings of happiness.

Another blogger also writes about the joy that is created through clothing consumption. The author of The Note Passer writes:

“I find there's a delicate balance between holding tight to items I love and letting go of ones that no longer add value to my life. But once I decide to let go, I'm happy to see the thing change hands and bring pleasure to someone else. I love our [clothing] swaps because I'm able to see someone delight in one of my items in person—squealing, grinning, and mugging for the camera with their new love—it's quite different than dropping it off at a thrift store to go who knows where. The excitement for both giver and receiver is intoxicating.” (The Note Passer, n.d.)

This quote demonstrates firstly that clothes add value to the blogger’s life and she has a strong connection to clothes as she associates feelings of love with them. Secondly, the quote illustrates that clothing can create delight and excitement both for herself and others. In addition, the acquisition of new clothes causes such a strong emotional reaction that people outwardly express their happiness through actions like “squealing” and “grinning”, as mentioned in the quote above. This implies that many consumers purchase new clothing for the happiness and excitement that it causes them to feel. However, in quote from The Note Passer the clothes are consumed through clothing swaps. This is a sustainable way for individuals to dispose of old clothing and acquire new clothing, since all the clothes are

reused by different consumers. The author of the blog post also addresses the issue of sustainability in the post by writing:

“While our swaps are always a good time, we do have an agenda: swapping is an easy way to be ethical and sustainable. By swapping, we reduce the demand for new clothing and make use of items that already exist.” (The Note Passer, n.d.)

Therefore, it is clear that the acquisition of new garments provides a great sense of joy to these consumers, although they attempt to reduce their environmental impact through clothes swaps. This allows them to experience the desired end state of happiness through possession acquisition without causing more harm to the environment. Similarly, the blogger of Plein Vanity writes in one post:

“As a capsule collection, VETTA consists of only 5 pieces of clothing that you can wear 30 different ways! As a lover of multi-functional clothing, I literally squealed for joy when I saw this!” (Plein Vanity, 16.03.2016)

In this quote from Plein Vanity the blogger expresses her joy at finding clothing that she loves. As in the previous example from The Note Passer, this blogger also “squealed” because the clothes made her feel so happy. However, the blogger of Plein Vanity also emphasizes in her blog post that the VETTA clothing capsule uses eco-friendly materials and is responsibly made in the U.S, which means that it is a sustainable clothing brand. The blogger expresses her happiness at finding clothes that bring her joy with their versatility and design, as well as clearly stating that the company is a sustainable clothing manufacturer. Therefore, the blogger does not attempt to diminish the joy that fashion brings her, however, she does look for products from sustainable brands that she can then get excited about purchasing.

Other bloggers also express the idea of finding joy through possessions, but only consuming sustainably made products. For example, the blogger of The Peahen wrote in one post:

“I’m innately drawn to beauty, to art, and to the creation of things that don’t exist in nature. Things that come only by human hand. I refuse to apologize for this because style adds so much interest to my life and I’m driven to bring this joy to others. But I also believe it can be done ethically. In a way where rampant consumerism is subdued and makers are respected.” (The Peahen, 16.02.2019)

The Peahen’s blogger is passionate about fashion and feels that she does not need to apologize for her love of stylish things or the joy that fashion brings her and others. Additionally, she not only derives happiness from possessions, she also expects others to experience happiness from possessions. She also wants to share her joy with others and allow them to experience the joys of fashion and beautiful possessions. However, she wants her fashion items to be sustainably made and thoughtfully purchased. Therefore, she can satisfy her desire for beautiful and stylish possessions that bring her joy without contributing to “rampant consumerism” (The Peahen, 16.02.2019).

“In order to live sustainably, we need to move beyond our desire for consumption, and see shopping as functional activity rather than a pastime. Wardrobes full of impulse purchases we hardly wear are a wasted resource. So what do we do if we are bored with our current selection and desire a change? Let’s be honest, we all love to buy something new once in a while, and there isn’t anything wrong with that. But we need to take a closer look at our closets. Instead of expanding into more closet space, we need to make a deal with ourselves that we will maintain or reduce our current wardrobe size.” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018)

Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness conflicts with sustainable values because in order to be sustainable, clothing should be purchased based on the utility gained from it. When consumers shop in order to feel happiness it can encourage them to purchase items they do not need or use. According to Tortoise and Lady Grey (19.12.2018), shopping should be a “functional activity rather than a pastime”, hence consumers should curb their desire for new possessions if they wish to consume sustainably. One way that the blogger of Tortoise and Lady Grey suggests negotiating between these desires is to keep a fixed number of items in an individual’s wardrobe. This reduces waste and clothing production materials.

The bloggers often write about love for fashion items. They not only express the love they feel towards their garments, but they also tell readers that everyone should love the items they own. It can be assumed that if you love your possessions, these possessions will create feelings of happiness. Therefore, achieving happiness through consumption is an aspect that the bloggers actually encourage. Whilst this is a materialistic desire there is also a sustainable angle to loving one's possessions. If a consumer feels a strong emotional bond with their possessions then they are more likely to keep those items for a longer period of time, which would ideally encourage them to purchase less items and focus on continuing to find happiness in the items they already own. For example, The Peahen and The Sustainable Edit tell their readers:

“Do cultivate a life where you're able to walk away from things the things you have, but give yourself permission to love them while they're yours.” (The Peahen, 16.02.2019)

“...one of the easiest ways to handle the desire to shop is to love what you already have. Personally, I love pulling my clothes out of storage at the start of a new season. It feels like a whole new wardrobe and helps you fall in love with your clothes again.” (The Sustainable Edit, 15.02.2018)

Therefore, the bloggers encourages other consumers to love their possessions. Cultivating love for possessions can encourage consumers to be more sustainable with their fashion consumption by increasing the amount of happiness they derive from each garment, which diminishes the need to acquire new garments to induce new feelings of happiness from possessions. This creates an idea of having fewer possessions that each contribute more to happiness (as opposed to more possessions that each contribute less to happiness). Another blogger wrote in a post:

“Most of us have far too many clothes in our wardrobe, whilst we tend to stick to a few favourites that really make us feel great. So imagine this for a moment: imagine if you had a wardrobe with fewer garments than you currently own, but it

only contained items that made you feel great and that you always want to wear?”
(Tortoise and Lady Grey, 24.10.2018)

This quote supports the idea that possessions can still bring consumers a lot of happiness, however, the number of possessions does not need to be incredibly high in order for this to happen. Therefore, consumers can negotiate between acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and sustainability desires by curating a closet that only contains items that truly make them happy and abstaining from purchasing garments that do not truly make them happy.

4.3. Acquisition Centrality

Another theme of materialism is acquisition centrality. According to Richins & Dawson (1992), the acquisition of possessions can give consumers meaning and also provide them with a daily goal. Whilst clothing serves a utilitarian function, most consumers do not purchase fashion solely for utilitarian purposes. The bloggers analyzed in this blog also demonstrate that they wish to acquire new fashion items for reasons other than to serve a purely utilitarian function. These desires can be viewed as materialistic desires for possessions because they are not based on a real need. However, in accordance with the bloggers' commitment to sustainable fashion, the bloggers only express their desire to consume fashion deemed sustainable.

The bloggers often discuss fashion items that they either wish to purchase or have already purchased. One blogger wrote in a blog post:

“...recently I came across the perfect leather pants and decided to defy my body chemistry. Said pants checked all the boxes: classic color, great quality, cropped cut (I’m short!), and consciously designed in Austin. I had to have them and there was no way I was letting these bad boys hang out in my closet until solstice subsided.” (The Peahen, 05.07.2018)

This quote demonstrates that the blogger did not purchase the pants because she had a utilitarian need for leather pants. Rather, she bought the pants because she thought they

were stylish and fit her style perfectly. The blogger also confessed that the leather pants were impractical for the hot Austin summer, however, she purchased and wore the pants despite the fact that they were not very functional during the summer season. Her materialistic desire for the pants was very clearly expressed by the statement “I had to have them” (The Peahen, 05.07.2018).

The Peahen’s blogger was thus able to fulfil her materialistic desire for stylish pants by purchasing them from a brand that creates leather garments sustainably. However, unlike a lot of consumers who purchase fashion items that they do not end up wearing, the blogger was determined to wear her leather pants even in the heat, which she demonstrated by writing that she would not let them go unused in her closet. Therefore, even though she made an impractical purchase based on her materialistic desires, she did use the product so as not to waste it. In this way she made her materialistic purchase more sustainable.

A blog post on Eco Boost also reads:

“I’ve had my eye on the Hackney jumpsuit (below) by P.i.C for a while and when they popped up as part of A Luxe Story’s latest collaboration in Chelsea, I couldn’t resist taking her [the jumpsuit] home.” (Eco Boost, 13.04.2017)

This quote demonstrates that the blogger has already felt a desire for the jumpsuit she discusses and she has thought about purchasing it for some time. In the above quote she says that she “couldn’t resist” purchasing the jumpsuit when she later came across it. This demonstrates that she had a strong desire to obtain this garment of clothing and she gave into the desire although a jumpsuit is not an item of clothing for which she had a utilitarian need that could not be satisfied by another product. Therefore, the acquisition of the jumpsuit allowed the blogger to fulfil her materialistic desire whilst supporting a sustainable brand that uses organic cotton. In addition, the blogger considered the product prior to purchase, hence her purchase was not based entirely on impulse.

The bloggers also demonstrate that they have long-term goals related to their wardrobes and products that they wish to purchase.

“I’m always on the hunt for stylish pants, that don’t actually make me feel or look like I’ve just hit the gym, and ones I can wear around the house and also out for a casual day (maybe on a dress-down Friday at work).” (Plein Vanity, 24.09.2018)

“I’m constantly trying to build that ideal capsule wardrobe to hold on to for years to come.” (Sustainably Chic, 11.03.2018)

The first quote shows that the search for stylish pants is an ongoing endeavour for the blogger of Plein Vanity. The successful acquisition of pants that meet her style needs can then be viewed as a long-term goal that she wishes to accomplish. It is also likely that she will continue with her “hunt for stylish pants” (Plein Vanity, 24.09.2018) even if she finds one pair that satisfies this desire because she is “always” searching for them. The blog post on Sustainably Chic (11.03.2018) demonstrates a similar desire and long-term goal pertaining to the acquisition of fashion items. Therefore, the acquisition of new fashion items is a goal that she is pursuing.

The above quotes exemplify materialistic desires that the bloggers have to obtain more clothing without a utilitarian need. The satisfaction of these materialistic desires conflicts with the sustainability goal of only purchasing items that are necessary. In addition, sustainable consumers should try to find satisfaction in the items they already own if these items can still function to fulfil the purpose they were purchased for.

There are also instances where the bloggers recognized their desire for more fashion items, however, they attempted to curb these desires instead of fulfilling them. For example, one blogger wrote about how it is important for her to abstain from over-consuming products, nevertheless

“...this can be difficult sometimes when there are so many thoughtfully-designed, gorgeous, sustainable brands available now.” (Eco Cult, 08.11.2018)

Eco Cult's blogger still experiences a strong desire for new fashion items and finds it difficult not to acquire all the beautiful products she encounters. She curbs her desire for large amounts of new goods in order to consume more sustainably. In another blog post the blogger also wrote

"I went through Made Trade and had a grand time pretending I could buy every single thing I saw. Click through to shop my absolute favorites!" (Eco Cult, 13.12.2018)

In this post the blogger did not report having purchased anything from the online store Made Trade, however, she conveyed a clear desire to purchase all the products she saw on the site. She also compiled a list of her favourite products from the store. This can be viewed as window shopping, since the blogger examined the different products and thought about what it would be like to acquire the items for herself. However, she did not purchase any of the items she desired to have, therefore, she denied her materialistic desire to acquire lots of new goods in order to fulfil her desire to consume sustainably. Although it is highly unlikely and unrealistic that any consumer would literally purchase all the products available at a store, the blogger in this example would have likely made at least one purchase from the store if she had been acting solely on her materialistic desires. In addition, she is sharing her materialistic desires with her readers and encouraging them to shop for items that she loves.

Another blogger wrote in one of her posts:

"Autumn cometh and there's only one thing getting me through the fear of peering out of the window at 3pm wondering if it's actually midnight... purchasing some knitwear! To allay my guilt (I've got about 127 open tabs tight [sic] now!) I thought I'd turn my casual browsing of the internet for sustainable knitwear into a blog post... because... I need to justify all this "research" I've been dedicating my time to somehow.... [...] wool knits are always an investment piece." (Eco Boost, 05.10.2017)

This quote demonstrates firstly, that the blogger is looking forward to purchasing new clothes. She views the acquisition of new knitwear as the only positive aspect of the long, dark days ahead, which she otherwise appears to dread. However, she also appears to feel guilt over the purchase of new knitwear, which is likely due to the fact that purchasing a lot of new clothing is not considered sustainable behaviour. This demonstrates conflict between her different desires. She has also spent time and effort looking for her new knitwear, as evidenced by the 127 tabs she says she has open at the time of writing her post. Therefore, finding new knitwear for herself appears to be a goal that she has dedicated her time and effort to. Materialistic individuals dedicate more resources to the acquisition of new possessions (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Due to this, dedicating large amounts of time to the acquisition of new possessions is a materialistic consumption behaviour.

The blogger of Eco Boost is also seen, however, to use this time and effort spent on browsing clothes online to write a blog post about sustainable knitwear that can help readers choose ethically and sustainably made knitwear. The blogger also justifies the purchase of new knitwear by calling it an investment. Therefore, she wants to fulfil her materialistic desire for new knitwear whilst also fulfilling her sustainability desire to only purchase clothes that she will wear repeatedly.

The desire to keep purchasing new clothes that are not necessary creates conflict between materialistic and sustainability desires. The bloggers also appear to be aware of this conflict. This conflict is visible in the example below:

“Do you ever feel guilty about purchasing a new piece for your closet? Or is budget a deterrent when shopping for sustainably-made clothing? I’ve dealt with this many times before, and I’m sure a lot of you would relate to these experiences, as well. That’s why when I first heard about Swap Society, I was immediately drawn to the concept. ...With the apparel industry being the 4th largest industrial polluter, it’s easy to feel ashamed when purchasing a new article of clothing. While I do believe it’s important to support the brands who are doing it right, buying second hand is always a good thing, no matter where it came from. ...Ever heard,

“oh, I can’t wear that. I already posted it on Instagram.” I don’t know how many of my friends have said this very thing, and would run off to Forever 21 to purchase a new dress for the weekend event. {side note: I was guilty of this many years ago, too!} With Swap Society, you can constantly update your wardrobe so you never get bored.” (Sustainably Chic, 09.07.2018)

The above quote from Sustainably Chic indicates that the blogger has experienced feelings of guilt and shame regarding new purchases and that she assumes this to be a dilemma that many readers can relate to. This also implies that the act of purchasing a garment can be considered a shameful act. The blogger is aware of the adverse environmental impacts that fashion production has, which creates feelings of guilt at the purchase of new clothing that contributes to environmental degradation. In addition, many consumers feel the need to showcase a large range of clothing and avoid reusing outfits. This contradicts with the sustainability values of limiting the number of garments they own and maximising the number of times they are used. In the post from Sustainably Chic, the blogger negotiated between her desire for possession acquisition and sustainability values by utilizing a clothing swap service that allows her to exchange clothes with other consumers. This allows the consumer to constantly acquire new items and dispose of old items without creating waste or purchasing new clothes.

The bloggers also often remind their readers that they are not encouraging them to needlessly purchase more fashion items and voice their concerns about possible overconsumption. The quotes below are examples of this:

“I live a zero waste lifestyle, and whilst choosing secondhand is often my first port of call, I also feel strongly about supporting brands who are producing in a way that is kinder to the environment, with longevity in mind. As always, I am no way encouraging you to spend more money on items you don’t need. But, there may come a time when we do need to invest in something and it is for those moments that showing a collection of more sustainable or ethical alternatives in a post such as this can be useful and informative. ...I’ve personally, found a happy balance of buying fewer things, wearing what I already own more often and choosing

secondhand and organic materials from sustainable brands when needed. To quote Vivienne Westwood, remember to “Buy Less, Choose Well and Make It Last.””(Eco Boost, 23.11.2017)

“My fear is that this idea of ‘too much stuff’ will infiltrate ethical fashion. And, even worse, that my work covering brands will contribute to consumers treating them like fast fashion. This seriously keeps me up at night.” (The Peahen, 30.05.2016)

Due to the fact that the bloggers remind their readers that they are not encouraging wanton consumption, it is clear that the bloggers worry that their fashion blogs encourage consumers to purchase sustainable fashion in an unsustainable way. The Peahen (30.05.2016) clearly indicates that purchasing too many items, even if they are purchased from sustainable brands, is not sustainable consumption behaviour. Therefore, there is a clear conflict between acquisition centrality and sustainable values. This conflict cannot be negotiated simply by purchasing from sustainable brands with the same consumption habits as when purchasing from fast fashion brands. Instead, this conflict can be negotiated for example, by purchasing second-hand clothing, making thoughtful purchases, and using the same items for extended periods of time.

4.4. Fast Fashion and Consumerism in Opposition to Sustainability

The bloggers address fast fashion and consumerism in their blogs and discuss these topics very negatively. Fast fashion is viewed as the opposite of sustainable fashion and readers are encouraged to entirely avoid purchasing fast fashion. Similarly, consumers are urged to forgo their consumerist habits and move away from the ideology of consumerism altogether. In the blogs consumerism is viewed as an ideology that encourages unsustainable consumption. The concept of consumerism used by the bloggers can also be linked to the idea of acquisition centrality.

According to the bloggers, consumerism causes individuals to become overly preoccupied with constantly acquiring new possessions that they neither use nor truly enjoy. Although the bloggers themselves display instances of acquisition centrality, they frame acquisition

centrality in the context of consumerism and fast fashion consumption as incompatible with sustainable values. Over-consumption opposes sustainability and fast fashion cannot be consumed in a sustainable way because the methods of fast fashion production and consumption conflict with sustainability in a way that cannot be reconciled. The consumerist ideology also encourages fast fashion consumption, which is deemed as morally wrong. For example, one blogger writes that

“[[f]ast fashion can pollute your world and the environment in various ways. Your best bet is to stop bringing it home and if you already have items of fast fashion, try to upcycle them as much as possible to prevent them from entering landfills.” (Live Eco, 17.11.2015)

This quote implies that the effects of fast fashion go beyond their detrimental environmental impacts and that fast fashion is capable of polluting your entire “world.”

4.4.1. Fast Fashion as an Addiction

“I created by (sic) capsule wardrobe as a way to break my fast fashion addiction and terrible shopping habits....It helped me break my fast fashion addiction and enable me to explore ethical fashion.” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018)

The blogs also portray fast fashion as an addiction that must be broken. Some bloggers use the term “fast fashion addiction” explicitly, whilst others use the concept more implicitly. For example, The Sustainable Edit’s blogger discusses her “fast fashion addiction” in a blog post (The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018). According to the blogger, breaking her fast fashion addiction allowed her to move onto sustainable fashion. This supports the notion that fast fashion is not sustainable and consumers must transition away from fast fashion if they wish to start consuming fashion sustainably.

“Whether you’ve been addicted to fast fashion...most of us end up with a wardrobe containing many items that we never or rarely wear.” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 24.10.2018)

“Any time we make a conscious decision to avoid something we used to love, be it meat, cheese, sugar, (or exes!), we miss it. We can’t help it....Forgoing fast fashion feels the same way. Even if we’re ready to make a leap into ethical shopping, we can’t help but look back lovingly at the brands that used to fill our closets.” (The Peahen, 18.06.2018)

The use of the word “addiction” implies that fast fashion is comparable to a drug with negative effects. The bloggers also recognize that it is difficult to stop purchasing fast fashion, just as quitting an addictive substance is difficult. For example, one blogger writes advice for readers who are “struggling to move away from fast fashion” (The Peahen, 18.06.2018). The blogger of The Peahen also writes that “[f]orgoing fast fashion” (The Peahen, 18.06.2018) is difficult like avoiding meat products or sugar. The bloggers encourage their readers to stop purchasing fast fashion entirely, which implies that the bloggers have not found a way to negotiate between the materialistic desires to obtain fast fashion and sustainability desires. Therefore, in this case, consumers must make a choice between their competing desires as the two different desires cannot be reconciled. This sentiment is also supported by the fact that the bloggers do not purchase or use any fast fashion products. For example, one blogger stated that she “quit buying fast fashion” (Eco Boost, 29.01.2018) and transitioned into a zero waste lifestyle instead.

4.4.2. Consumerism

The bloggers discuss the concept of consumerism as an ideology that makes individuals purchase high quantities of products that they do not really need or use, which creates large amounts of waste, pollution and inequality. One blogger writes:

“We are all influenced by the culture of consumerism we find ourselves in, whether we realise this or not. Consumerism subtly (or not-so-subtly) influences the way we accumulate possessions. This happens even to the ethically-conscious thrift shopper, who can often be just as susceptible to a bargain, and just as likely to make an impulse purchase that ends up being rarely worn.” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 24.10.2018)

The blogger of Tortoise and Lady Grey states that consumerism influences individual's accumulation of possessions, for example, through impulse purchases that individuals wear rarely. This blogger also makes it clear that all consumers are susceptible to the influences of consumerism, even the ones who are trying to be sustainable and conscious consumers. Another example of how consumerism impacts consumers' consumption habits is visible in The Sustainable Edit. The blogger writes:

“When I was shopping fast fashion I didn't really have a personal style. I didn't realise it at the time but my style had become whatever Topshop was telling me to wear. It was very trend led and never really felt like me” (The Sustainable Edit, 03.07.2018).

In the aforementioned example the blogger reflects on the fact that she never developed a personal style when she was consuming fast fashion because she simply bought clothes that were trendy at the time instead of clothes that she felt expressed her identity and sense of self.

According to the bloggers, consumerism also encourages over-consumption, which has a multitude of adverse environmental impacts. The author of Tortoise and Lady Grey writes that

“[a]s a global population we already consume more than the earth can sustainably support.” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018)

She also states that “our appetite for fashion” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018) has a significant impact on resources and global greenhouse gas emissions. The author of Eco Cult refers to the traditional fashion market as “toxic mass-market fashion” (Eco Cult, 28.12.2018) and advises her readers to avoid it. The author of The Note Passer mentions that one consequence of “unfettered consumerism” (The Note Passer, n.d.) is that second-hand markets and landfills can barely cope with the amount of textile waste consumers create each year. According to the blogger the

“...rise of fast fashion parallels growing global inequality and degradation of our planet. Capitalism is a strain on the earth's resources, and deems both the environment and people to be as disposable as your \$10 denim.” (The Note Passer, n.d.)

This blogger directly links fast fashion to issues of inequality and environmental degradation. In addition, she links capitalism and consumerism together and implies that capitalism encourages over-consumption. Capitalism is portrayed very negatively in this quote as the author tells readers that capitalism treats them as disposable just like the products that it encourages consumers to purchase. The quote is also a reference to the fast fashion garment makers who receive low wages and often have poor working conditions. The blogger adds that a “revolution is certainly in order” (The Note Passer, n.d.). This demonstrates how strongly she feels about the need for a change in the system as well as personal consumption habits. The word “revolution” has strong connotations and implies that the needed change is large-scale and that action must be taken to oppose capitalism, consumerism and fast fashion.

“In our fast-paced society, we are encouraged to think fast, decide quickly, and shop impulsively, often consuming without rhyme or reason.” (Plein Vanity, 29.01.2018)

This quote implies that in a consumerist society individuals often consume mindlessly and without planning or forethought. The bloggers warn against the negative impacts of “rampant consumerism” (The Peahen, 16.02.2019) and “the wasteful, unethical fashion industry” (Plein Vanity, 16.03.2016). The author of Eco Edit also writes a disclaimer to tell readers that the blog does not “advocate fast fashion or unnecessary spending” (The Eco Edit, 29.12.2017) in a blog post that discusses sales at eco-conscious fashion brands. The bloggers clearly oppose the ideas of consumerism and fast fashion, thus they aim to make it clear that they do not advocate mindless fashion purchases and encourage consumers to think hard before they buy. Indeed, another blogger stated that “[i]n order to live

sustainably, we need to move beyond our desire for consumption” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018).

The bloggers’ discussion of fast fashion demonstrates that they view the ideology of consumerism and fast fashion consumption as completely opposed to the ideology of sustainable consumption. Furthermore, consumers cannot subscribe to both ideologies simultaneously because they are too contradictory. As discussed earlier in this thesis, the bloggers were able to negotiate between their materialistic desires for fashion in terms of acquisition centrality, for example, by purchasing exclusively sustainable fashion. Fast fashion consumption can be viewed as an example of acquisition centrality, however, the bloggers make it clear that consumers cannot negotiate between fast fashion consumption and sustainable consumption and must therefore choose only one of these. Due to this, acquisition centrality can be reconciled with sustainable values with regard to sustainably produced products, although not with regard to fast fashion products.

In addition, the bloggers construct the idea of consumerism as an extreme form of materialism. Even though the bloggers also have materialistic desires and aim to satisfy these desires through their consumption decisions, they exercise restraint so as not to fulfil each materialistic desire they have for new fashion items. This suggests that the forms of materialism that they choose to satisfy are less harmful than the extreme form of materialism that consumerism encourages. Therefore, by discussing consumerism as a form of extreme and unacceptable materialism the bloggers show their readers where the line is between unacceptable materialistic behaviour and acceptable materialistic behaviour. This also mitigates their own materialistic consumption behaviour as this can be compared to the behaviours of consumerist consumption. In this way the bloggers are able to negotiate between acceptable and harmless materialism and unacceptable and harmful materialism.

4.5. Responsibilization

Consumers are made to feel responsible, or responsabilized, in several ways in the blog posts examined in this paper. The blogs try to encourage readers to act more in accordance to sustainable values than materialistic values. However, the bloggers also demonstrate that

consumers can fulfil their materialistic desires through consumption if they first expend time and effort in researching items prior to purchase in order to ensure that they are sustainably made or sourced. The blogs make it clear that the bloggers think everyone has a responsibility to make more sustainable purchasing decisions in terms of fashion. The two main ways that consumers are responsabilized in the blogs is through appeals for limiting the number of items purchased, and researching brands and products to make informed purchase decisions. Responsibilization also acts as a mechanism to combat consumerism and urge other consumers to make responsible and sustainable consumption decisions.

4.5.1. Responsibility to Buy Less and Be More Thoughtful

The blogs contain strong views opposing consumerism and over-consumption, as discussed previously in this paper. The blogs also responsabilize consumers to purchase less products overall and to make more thoughtful purchases when they do obtain new products. The blogs indicate that purchasing vast amounts of clothing is not a sustainable practice and that consumers are responsible for their own purchasing decisions. The blogger of Tortoise and Lady Grey writes that as “we move closer and closer to climate crisis, it is critically important that we start learning to live with less” (Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018). According to this aforementioned blog post, it is “critically important” that consumers decrease their consumption amounts because the high rate of consumption is contributing to the looming “climate crisis.” The blog post also mentions that fashion in particular contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and that fashion has a significant impact on the depletion of resources. The blog post also tells readers that

“In order to live sustainably, we need to move beyond our desire for consumption, [...] we need to make a deal with ourselves that we will maintain or reduce our current wardrobe size [...] We need to be able to leave behind craving for new and more items, and instead invest in fewer high quality pieces that are timeless.”
(Tortoise and Lady Grey, 19.12.2018)

The blogger uses the phrase “we need to” several times and thus, places responsibility on all consumers to curb their desire for constant consumption and instead utilize the products

they already own or purchase fashion items that can be considered an investment. The blogger of Tortoise and Lady Grey also draws attention to the fact that these are actions consumers must undertake if they desire to lead sustainable lives.

The Peahen sends a similar message to its readers. One post reads:

“I do want to emphasize that climate disaster and human rights violations aren’t problems we can solve by buying more stuff. We have a huge trash problem. Constantly consuming and regularly throwing stuff away is only going to make it worse. Especially seeing as most of our donated clothes won’t be bought by someone else, they’ll become another piece of waste.” (The Peahen, 06.11.2018)

This post also addresses the problem of constant consumption and the disposal of old garments. The author argues that people cannot solve problems by just buying more products – such behaviour does not benefit the environment or society. In addition, the blog clearly states that dramatically reducing consumption is the best method for dealing with the copious environmental and social issues connected to fashion.

“Here’s the lesson: If you want to be a more thoughtful consumer of fashion the biggest step you can take is to resist buying all together.” (The Peahen, 30.05.2016)

This quote makes a clear statement to readers that resisting new purchases is one of the best ways that they can become more thoughtful consumers and consume fashion in a more sustainable manner. The bloggers also encourage consumers to think more about the clothes that they already own instead of new clothes that they could purchase. For example, another blogger writes that many people purchase clothes too frequently and that

“[w]e all need to stop thinking about our next purchase and focus on what we already own.” (The Sustainable Edit, 08.11.2017)

This quote draws attention to the idea that the purchase phase should not be the most enjoyable phase of the clothing consumption cycle.

Even though the bloggers encourage readers to keep their wardrobes small and avoid purchasing many clothes, they do understand that a lot of women enjoy fashion and view owning a range of clothing as a necessity. Therefore, the bloggers also encourage readers to make thoughtful purchases when obtaining new clothes. This once again places the responsibility of making sustainable consumption decisions on the consumer. For example, one blogger writes that the reader should consider “how your purchase affects the environment, or who benefits from your purchase” (Plein Vanity, 29.01.2018). The idea that consumers must choose what they purchase wisely and carefully is also present in other blogs. One blog post implores readers: “please keeping [sic] buying fewer, better things” (The Peahen, 06.02.2018). Another blog post is titled “Shop Less, But Shop Better” (Plein Vanity, 22.11.2017).

4.5.2. Responsibility to Conduct Research and Be Informed

The blogs also responsabilize consumers to research brands and products prior to purchase in order to guarantee that the products are actually produced sustainably. Therefore, consumers cannot use lack of knowledge as an excuse to support unsustainable fashion brands. The consumer must take responsibility for vetting brands prior to purchase and ensure that the brand’s ethical and ecological considerations are authentic and clear. For example, one blog post asserts that

“It’s worth bearing in mind that the consumer should always do their own research into a brand, no matter how famous it is or how much it is claiming to be eco-friendly.” (Live Eco, 01.03.2016)

Therefore, the consumer must find facts regarding the brand as this is the only way to be certain that the brand’s practices match its claims. Consumers should be informed about fashion brands in order to make informed consumption decisions.

Another blogger also instructs the reader to “[d]o your research” (Plein Vanity, 29.01.2018). According the Plein Vanity blog, conducting research is an essential part of acting as a conscious consumer. Furthermore, conscious consumers should not trust in or be convinced by “glossy marketing schemes, popular trends, or viral hype” (Plein Vanity, 29.01.2018). The bloggers explicitly instruct other consumers to conduct research. This also implies that a consumer cannot truly be acting sustainably if they do not actively research brands before purchasing their products. In addition to researching brands prior to purchase, consumers are also advised to research the materials and other aspects of the product. For example, a post on Eco Cult states that

“[y]ou should absolutely understand what you are buying, because it will effect its longevity, how you take care of it, how much value you are getting for the price, what it will look and feel like if you are buying it online, what you can do with it when you no longer want it, and its overall sustainability....Learn about them! Get to know them!” (Eco Cult, 28.12.2018)

In the aforementioned statement, the blog places the responsibility of learning about materials and their level of sustainability on the consumer. The consumer must “learn about” and “get to know” (Eco Cult, 28.12.2018) materials and garments before purchasing them because it is their responsibility to make sure they know exactly what they are purchasing. The consumer must also use this information to plan ahead to the use and disposal phases of the product.

The idea that consumers should be knowledgeable about materials and processes used to produce fashion items is also supported by the fact that the blogs often discuss the materials and production processes of the brands or products that they review on their blogs. This demonstrates to readers that the bloggers are interested in and aware of the environmental and social impacts of different materials and production processes. It also indicates that other consumers should be equally interested in these aspects of fashion. For example, one blogger has written:

“[a]s well as shopping second hand, I’m a firm believer in the benefits of organic cotton – and want to drive demand for conventional cotton farmers to switch to organic cotton farming. According to the Textile Exchange, currently only 0.4% of global cotton production is organic (I would highly recommend downloading their free cotton report for everything you need to know about the organic cotton market).” (Eco Boost, 29.01.2018)

Eco Boost’s blogger continues by providing more information about the benefits of organic cotton. This quote demonstrates that the blogger has researched organic cotton and concluded that it is a sustainable material for garments. She also writes that the cotton report contains “everything you need to know about the organic cotton market” (Eco Boost, 29.01.2018), which implies that consumers need information about the cotton market and should be informed about cotton production and use.

Therefore, the bloggers demonstrate to readers that they expend time and effort to conduct research on brands and products. The bloggers also instruct their readers to research products prior to purchase to ensure that the products are sustainably made. The bloggers express their opinion that it is the responsibility of each individual to ensure that their consumption behaviours are sustainable. In this way the bloggers responsabilize their readers.

5. Discussion

The main research question this thesis seeks to answer is: what does consumer discourse reveal about the way consumers negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainability desires?

Five central themes emerged from the data analysis. The discourses pertaining to these themes revealed that the bloggers have materialistic desires related to their fashion purchase and consumption behaviour. These materialistic desires that were identified are in line with the three themes of materialism identified by Richins & Dawson (1992). Therefore, the bloggers displayed evidence of materialistic desires, which supports previous literature on consumer materialism. However, the discourses in the blogs also revealed that the bloggers are focused on and committed to sustainable consumption. They appear to possess a lot of knowledge about brands, products, and practices that are sustainable. The bloggers additionally voice their opinions about how consumers should act in order to be sustainable. However, the discourses also displayed different conflicts that the bloggers felt between their desires for sustainable and materialistic consumption. There are several different ways in which these consumers were able to negotiate between their materialistic desires and sustainability desires.

5.1. Possession-defined Success

The first theme of materialism discussed was possession-defined success. The bloggers clearly stated that fashion is a very important and personal aspect for them. The bloggers discussed how they use fashion to express their self-identity, values and lifestyles. In addition, they discussed how fashion should be used as a means of self-expression and as a reflection of the individual's desired self-image, thus making the individual feel true to themselves and accurately represented to others. These are examples of materialistic desires because materialistic consumers rely excessively on possessions for self-expression, pleasure-seeking or status-seeking (Ger & Belk, 1999). The impact that fashion can have on a consumer's sense of self and self-expression appeared to be high as fashion items were perceived to affect how the consumer feels about their identity and how they believe other people will perceive their identity.

Relying heavily on possessions to create and convey a sense of self conflicts with sustainability values because it causes the individual to make purchasing decisions that are not based on utilitarian needs. When the consumer's sense of self or lifestyle changes the individual feels a need to discard old possessions that reflect the old sense of self and acquire new possessions that reflect the new sense of self. This conflicts with the sustainability value of using products for as long as possible and avoiding the purchase of new products that are not necessary.

However, the blogs contained a lot of discourse pertaining to the concept of the conscious consumer. This is an identity that the bloggers identify with and discuss explicitly and implicitly. The identity of the conscious consumer is strongly rooted in sustainable behaviour because conscious consumers aim to be responsible and make sustainable consumption decisions. These consumers think carefully about the products and brands that they purchase in order to minimize the negative effects of their consumption behaviours. The bloggers vet brands prior to purchase, make considered purchasing decisions, and purchase products that are aligned with their sustainability values.

According to the bloggers, being a conscious consumer does not mean that an individual has to entirely stop purchasing goods due to materialistic desires. The identity of the conscious consumer is also rooted in being a consumer and the bloggers do not aim to completely distance themselves from the behaviours and joys of consumption. The identity of the conscious consumer is also reflected in the brands and products that these conscious consumers purchase. It is materialistic for an individual to desire that their possessions reflect the identity and lifestyle that the individual wishes to portray (Richins & Dawson, 1992). When consumers use their possessions to signal a desired self-image they are fulfilling their materialistic desires in accordance with possession-defined success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). The bloggers demonstrate that they have these materialistic desires and that they are able to fulfil them through their possessions. However, the bloggers had to negotiate between these materialistic desires and their sustainability desires.

The values that the bloggers mentioned in their posts were also related to sustainable values, as were their lifestyles. Therefore, the consumers negotiate between materialistic and sustainability desires by using their possessions as a tool for self-expression, as well as by closely tying their sustainable values into the identity they wish to express. In this way, the consumers are able to tie their identity to their possessions whilst also expressing their sustainability desires and values. The bloggers are also careful to only acquire possessions that are in line with their sustainable values in order to represent and signal these values through their possessions. Due to this, the desire to be sustainable is not hampered by the desire to express their identity and lifestyle through their possessions. Therefore, the bloggers are able to consume for purposes of self-expression and self-definition whilst purchasing sustainably made products that do not conflict with their desire to consume sustainably and identify as a sustainable consumer.

5.2. Acquisition as the Pursuit of Happiness

The second theme of materialism discussed is acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, which refers to the phenomenon whereby individuals pursue happiness through consumption and view possessions as an essential part of a satisfying life (Richins & Dawson, 1992). The bloggers studied in this thesis regard fashion as a source of joy and they also encourage other consumers to acquire fashion items that bring them joy. Pursuing feelings of happiness and joy through acquisition and consumption is a materialistic desire (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Therefore, consuming fashion in order to feel happiness allows the consumer to fulfil this materialistic desire. However, pursuing happiness through the acquisition of new garments conflicts with sustainability desires because it creates a large amount of demand for new clothing, which depletes resources and causes more environmental damage through the production processes utilized to create garments and fashion accessories (Vehmas et al., 2018).

The bloggers negotiate between their materialistic and sustainability desires in different ways that allow them to pursue happiness through possessions whilst satisfying their desires for sustainable consumption. One way that the bloggers negotiate between their conflicting desires is by only purchasing fashion items that are sustainably produced or second-hand. This allows them to fulfil their sustainability desires and shop according to

their sustainable values even though they are relying on possessions as a source of happiness.

The bloggers additionally negotiate between materialistic desires and sustainable desires by attempting to prolong the happiness they feel from their possessions. By forming strong bonds and cultivating the positive feelings they have towards their fashion items, the bloggers reduce their need to constantly acquire new possessions in order to derive more happiness from them. The bloggers also encourage other consumers to love the clothes they currently possess in order to experience joy through fashion whilst reducing their rate of consumption.

The bloggers also utilize different methods to maximize the happiness they derive from fashion items. For example, some bloggers use the method of putting a portion of their clothing in storage, so that when they bring these clothes back into use it feels as if they had just acquired new garments. This allows them to experience the joy of a new acquisition without actually making any new purchases and expending more resources on fashion items. Some bloggers also engage in sustainable consumption practices like clothing swaps, which allows them to acquire new items that create feelings of joy without causing any additional environmental damage due to the fact that the clothes have already been purchased and are reused through the clothes swap.

The bloggers freely discuss their love for fashion and do not feel that it is wrong for a person to love their possessions and find happiness in their possessions. In addition, this phenomenon of experiencing joy through possessions actually supports their sustainability desires and values because they feel more satisfied with the possessions they own. This limits the amount of new possessions they acquire and also causes them to dispose of less items, which creates less waste. Textile waste creates environmental damage as well as depleting natural resources (Goworek et al., 2012). Therefore, reducing the amount of clothing that a consumer purchases and disposes of is more sustainable consumer behaviour.

The discourse in the blogs also indicates that if a consumer is bored or unhappy with their clothes they will not feel inspired to make different outfit combinations that allow them to wear the clothes for a long time because none of their outfits give them a sense of joy. This will lead them to purchase more clothing and to use each item for a shorter period of time. When a consumer purchases fashion items that they love and that fulfil their materialistic desire to find happiness in their possessions they can also fulfil their sustainability desires to use clothes for a long time and avoid purchasing clothes that will never be worn. Therefore, it is possible for a consumer to simultaneously fulfil their materialistic desire to pursue happiness through possessions and their desire to consume sustainably. However, their acquisitions must be considered beforehand, sustainably made or acquired through sustainable methods, such as second-hand, and responsibly disposed of.

5.3. Acquisition Centrality

According to the findings, there appear to be more conflict between sustainability desires and the desire to consume for reasons of acquisition centrality than the other two themes of materialism. According to Richins & Dawson (1992), acquisition centrality is when consumers use the acquisition and consumption of goods to provide meaning to their lives and an aim for their endeavours and activities. This theme can also be linked to overconsumption because previous studies have found that materialistic consumers purchase more clothing than non-materialistic consumers and materialistic consumers do not use all the clothing items they purchase (Joung, 2013). In addition, purchasing large quantities of unnecessary clothing is harmful to the environment and contributes to social problems like slave labour (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Joung, 2013).

Despite their commitment to sustainable consumption, the bloggers displayed instances of the desire to acquire more clothing and fashion items for purposes that were not utilitarian or based on their needs. Some bloggers had the acquisition of certain fashion items as a long-term goal, which demonstrates that the acquisition of new possessions is still a desire and focus that they have. Therefore, the bloggers still experience materialistic desires and urges to purchase new possessions. The bloggers also voice their concerns about inadvertently using their blogs to encourage other consumers to heedlessly purchase unnecessary fashion items. The bloggers alleviate this concern by frequently reminding

their readers to make less purchases and to make thoughtful purchasing decisions. The bloggers also admit that it is sometimes difficult not to give in to the materialistic desire to purchase something on impulse or without consideration. This highlights one of the struggles that the bloggers experience between their conflicting desires. The bloggers do sometimes struggle with making sustainable consumption decisions as opposed to fulfilling their desires according to acquisition centrality.

However, the bloggers have multiple ways of negotiating between their materialistic desires and the desire to be sustainable. The bloggers try to limit the number of items they purchase and try to only purchase items they will use many times. The bloggers also research the items or brands prior to purchase in order to ensure that they are made sustainably and support the sustainable values that the bloggers have. In addition, when the bloggers do make unnecessary purchases based on materialistic desires, they still use the items that they purchased in order to avoid wasting them.

5.4. Fast Fashion and Consumerism in Opposition to Sustainable Fashion

The bloggers explicitly warn readers against purchasing fast fashion and conforming to consumerist ideology. The blogs generally define consumerism as a desire to consume without need or forethought, impulse purchasing, and buying items that will never be used. In the blogs the idea of consumerism is also closely connected to the idea of over-consumption. The bloggers clearly discourage over-consumption and advocate against being overly focused on constantly acquiring new clothes on impulse or fleeting desire. According to the bloggers, consumerism causes people to purchase too many products, which depletes natural resources, causes waste, and takes advantage of workers. These ideas support literature according to which the large quantities of clothing that are purchased and then disposed of create harm to the environment and societies (e.g. Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Joy et al., 2012; Goworek et al., 2012; Joung, 2013).

The bloggers construct the idea of consumerism as an extreme version of materialism. Over-consumption, unsustainably manufactured clothing, and thoughtless acquisition of

items is not sustainable, therefore, they are in opposition to the values and desires of sustainability. Since these materialistic desires and actions are in direct opposition to sustainability desires, the bloggers cannot negotiate between the conflicting desires. In this case the bloggers decided to act on their desires for sustainability rather than materialism. Based on the discourse available on the blogs it seems that over-consumption and thoughtless purchasing cannot be considered sustainable even if an individual is over-consuming sustainable brands. Therefore, a sustainable consumer cannot engage in practices of over-consumption, thoughtless purchases or supporting brands that use unethical and environmentally harmful production methods.

The bloggers also draw a connection between fast fashion and consumerism because both cause consumers to make unsustainable consumption decisions. As with consumerism, the blogs view fast fashion as the opposite of sustainable fashion. This stark opposition makes negotiating between the two impossible for the bloggers. The blogs discuss the harmful environmental effects of fast fashion manufacturing and consumption processes as well as the social inequality for workers. The bloggers aim to dissuade readers from purchasing any fast fashion garments. It is also possible that the bloggers focus on fast fashion in relation to consumerism and unsustainable fashion industry practices because it distances sustainable fashion from the idea of consumerism and consumerist consumption tendencies.

The bloggers do not purchase fast fashion because they do not engage in consumption habits that they view as harmful to the environment or people. The fact that they abstain from purchasing fast fashion may make them feel as though they are less of a part of consumerist culture and ideology. Framing fast fashion and consumerism in opposition to sustainable fashion may reduce sustainable consumers' guilt.

5.5. Responsibilization

The blogs also contain discourses that responsabilize consumers to be more responsible and sustainable in their consumption habits. The bloggers clearly indicate that it is the responsibility of every individual to ensure that their purchase and consumption decisions are in line with sustainability values. The bloggers emphasize the fact that individual

consumers need to expend time and effort in researching and analysing the practices of the brands that they purchase from in order to ensure that these purchases support sustainable fashion production. Therefore, consumers can fulfil their materialistic desires by purchasing new products whilst also fulfilling their sustainability desires to consume products that have been produced sustainably. Through the responsabilization discourses the bloggers are also attempting to impart the conscious consumer identity upon their readers since responsible consumption is an important part of being a conscious consumer.

5.6. Research Summary

The aim of this thesis was to investigate how consumers negotiate between desires for materialistic consumption and sustainable consumption in the context of sustainable fashion. Previous research has found that materialistic consumers tend to engage less in sustainable consumption and other sustainable activities (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Joung, 2013). According to Kilbourne & Pickett (2008), consumers who experience conflict between materialistic values and sustainable values are more likely to act according to their materialistic values and diminish their concerns regarding sustainability issues. Therefore, previous research indicates that materialism and sustainability are rarely reconciled with each other. However, previous research has not examined how consumers negotiate between conflicting desires for materialistic consumption and sustainable consumption. The findings in this thesis indicate that it is possible for consumers to simultaneously fulfil their materialistic desires and sustainability desires, so that the two are not mutually exclusive.

However, not all desires for materialism and sustainability can be fulfilled simultaneously. For example, it is not possible for a consumer to be sustainable whilst constantly purchasing unnecessary new products that they will not use because this wastes resources and creates a large amount of waste and pollution. The bloggers analysed in this thesis encourage all consumers to avoid consumerist behaviour and the purchase of fast fashion as these are seen as being in opposition to sustainable consumption values. A consumer can, however, find joy and happiness through consumption whilst consuming sustainably if they limit the amount consumed and cultivate a great appreciation and connection to their possessions.

In addition, a consumer can fulfil their desire for possession-defined success through the consumption of sustainably produced products. Sustainable consumers can express their identity as a conscious consumer through the consumption of sustainable products. Consumers who are not concerned about sustainability issues can similarly also use sustainable products to indicate status through the purchase of expensive luxury sustainable goods or by purchasing goods that allow them to express their identity or desired lifestyle. The bloggers also responsabilize individuals to make sustainable consumption decisions and develop sustainable consumption habits. Even though the consumers analyzed in this thesis were not able to reconcile all materialistic and sustainability desires that they had, the consumers were able to negotiate between these desires in a variety of ways that allowed them to fulfil both materialistic and sustainability desires.

5.7. Practical Implications

This research has practical implications for retailers and consumers. Based on the findings, sustainable fashion producers and retailers must focus on the aesthetic and design qualities of their garments if they wish to appeal to a larger audience. This paper indicates that even consumers committed to sustainable consumption want to purchase sustainable fashion items that are aesthetically pleasing and allow them to express their own sense of style. Consumers also use their clothing to express their own identity, which means that sustainable clothing retailers should have a variety of items and styles. This will allow consumers to satisfy their desires for individual uniqueness, and cultivate their own identity and sense of style through their clothing.

Furthermore, if sustainable fashion brands want to appeal to consumers who are not sustainably oriented then their marketing activities should focus less on the appeals for sustainability and more on the style, quality, and unique features of the products as this would make them appeal to a wider group of consumers. This could also increase the sale of sustainable fashion, which would benefit the environment and society. Expensive sustainable brands can also position themselves as luxury brands that appeal to all

consumers who want to consume luxury goods in order to display status to others or cultivate a lifestyle of luxury.

Although sustainability as a main selling point may not appeal to the majority of consumers, sustainable brands should very clearly communicate to consumers about their sustainability efforts and make this information easily available to consumers. This will allow sustainably oriented consumers to easily find information about the brand, so that they can purchase products from the brand knowing that the brand is aligned with their sustainability values. This also allows consumers who are not sustainably oriented to develop a better image of sustainable brands and creates more interest in sustainably made products that allow consumers to also satisfy their materialistic desires. Emphasizing the materialistic aspects of sustainable fashion can also encourage more consumers to seek out sustainable fashion because they will realize that they do not have to compromise on their personal style or identity in order to consume fashion sustainably.

The findings of this paper also indicate that individuals and societies do not need to completely curb their materialistic desires in order to consume sustainably. Whilst consumers cannot satisfy all materialistic desires simultaneously with sustainability desires, it is possible to negotiate between these conflicting desires. Reducing consumption levels is important for sustainability reasons, due to which it is important for consumers to reduce the amount of new products they purchase. However, consumers can still find joy in their possessions and use their possessions as a means of self-expression without compromising on sustainable values. Therefore, these negotiations between desires for materialistic consumption and sustainable consumption can make it easier for consumers to shop sustainably as they do not need to change everything about their consumption habits in order to be a sustainable consumer.

5.8. Limitations of the Study

The method of discursive analysis through blogs poses a potential limitation for this study. For example, it was not possible to ask questions directly from the bloggers in order to probe for more information on topics. In addition, most of the bloggers reside in Western countries, such as the US and UK. Therefore, it is possible for results to vary in different

cultural contexts. All the bloggers analyzed were also females and there was not much variety in their age groups.

5.9. Suggestions for Further Research

This paper examines negotiations between materialism and sustainability in the context of sustainable fashion, however, further research could study this phenomenon in other contexts. Further research could investigate whether there is variance in the results or if there are any common methods for how consumers negotiate between these conflicting desires across a wide range of product categories. Further research could also examine whether there are differences in the way that materialistic and non-materialistic consumers negotiate between materialism and sustainability.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Blogs Used for Data and Analysis

No.	Category	Blog Name and Address	Website Traffic Ranking
1	The Buzz Creators	Eco Cult https://ecocult.com	644,746
2	The Spotters	Eco Boost http://eco-boost.co	1,491,860
3	The Guides	The Sustainable Edit https://www.thesustainableedit.com	1,519,029
4	The Spotters	Sustainably Chic https://www.sustainably-chic.com/	2,209,171
5	The Guides	Tortoise and Lady Grey http://www.tortoiseandladygrey.com	2,978,201
6	The Spotters	The Note Passer https://www.thenotepasser.com	4,104,147
7	The Behind the Scene-ers	The Eco Edit http://www.theecoedit.co.uk	5,257,662
8	The Spotters	The Peahen http://thepeahen.com	6,880,005
9	The Guides	Live Eco http://www.liveeco.co.za	7,183,129
10	The Buzz Creators	Plein Vanity http://pleinvanity.com	22,224,296